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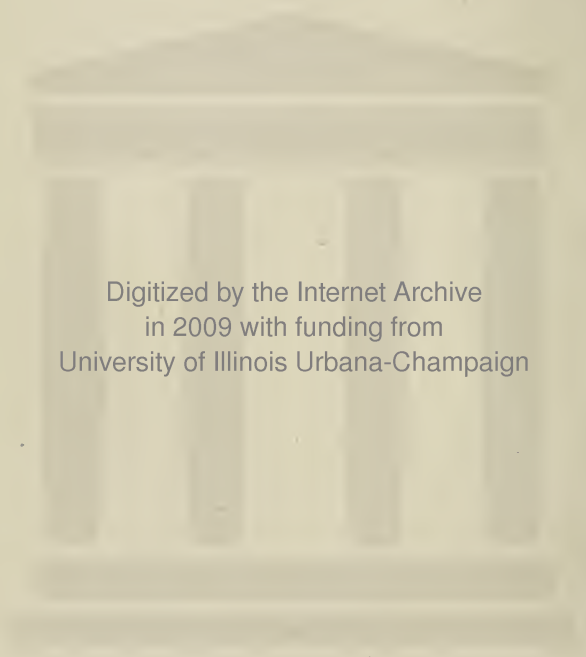
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WARD & DOWNEY, PUBLISHERS, LONDON.

AT THE MOMENT OF VICTORY.

BY

C. L. PIRKIS,

AUTHOR OF "A DATELESS BARGAIN," "LADY LOVELACE,"
"JUDITH WYNNE," ETC.

"Some there are who would make the stars spell out the decrees of Fate. Let such an one set his mind to read the big word 'Eternity,' inscribed from end to end of the heavens as on a scroll, and he will find the decrees of Fate written in characters too small for his eyesight."

Essay on "Star-gazing."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

London :

WARD AND DOWNEY,

12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

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AT

THE MOMENT OF VICTORY

CHAPTER I.

“I SAW nothing—absolutely nothing,” said Lance. “All I know is that Madge gave a startled cry and fell forward fainting. Her nerves, I should say, were over-strung—she has been far from well lately, you know—and she fancied she saw something. It was a thousand pities she attempted the funeral service.”

The Vicar had come to Lance's aid in the churchyard, and between them they had got Madge down to her carriage, and thence home. Arrived at home, she had

gone from one fainting fit into another during the early part of the night, and now, weak and exhausted, lay upon her bed while Sir Peter and Lance together discussed the strange occurrence.

Sir Peter echoed Lance's regret. "Yes, a thousand pities," he said, pushing back his chair and indulging in a brisk trot round the room, "but I've no doubt she'll be all right again by the morning; a good night's rest works wonders"—this was said at Lance's elbow. "And the little trip to Italy is just the very thing she's needing"—this was said at the door. "I say, Lance!"—here he came back at a run to Lance's elbow once more, with a look on his face which proclaimed a serious subject for thought on hand now.

Lance looked at him absently. He was leaning forward as he sat gazing dreamily into the fire. His appearance was scarcely

that of a happy-hearted bridegroom who expected to have his happiness crowned on the morrow.

Sir Peter was determined to have the whole of his attention.

"I say, Lance," he said again, raising his voice, "I do hope they'll remember to unmuffle that bell at the church; it would be dreadful if they started your wedding-peal to-morrow with a muffled C."

Then he set off on tramp again once more.

"Oh, they'll think of it right enough. The men are supposed to have an idea or two about their work."

"I think I had better send down a message in the morning to make sure—two, perhaps; one to the Vicar, and one to the verger?"

Here he paused in his quick march for a moment in front of his writing-table, as if

intending there and then to despatch his notes to Vicar and verger. He took up a pen, felt its nib, then laid it down and rubbed his eyes.

"The truth of it is I'm horribly sleepy," he said, deprecatingly, as if the fact called for an apology. "I've had, on the whole, a busy day—a busy and exciting day, I might say."

Lance roused himself from his reverie.

"If I were you, I should go to bed. You'll have lots to do to-morrow, you know."

Sir Peter rubbed his eyes again.

"Yes, I suppose, off and on, there will be a good deal on my hands," he said, complacently, "and one can't do without sleep altogether."

"I wouldn't try if I were you. It's past two——"

"Yes, and I must be up early. I've

told Simmonds to call me at five. And, by the way, Lance, don't you think an awning should be put up from the church to the gate?—it might rain, you know. By the way, I wonder if it will rain; I'll just tap the barometer again."

"The one outside your bedroom door is more dependable than this, and here's your lamp, Uncle Peter," said Lance, facilitating as far as possible the old gentleman's departure.

Half-way up the stairs he paused, calling to Lance over the balusters. "I say, Lance, I suppose there really is nothing to keep me up any longer? Madge is really coming round all right, isn't she?"

"Lady Judith said she left her asleep half an hour ago, and her maid has gone to bed in the next room—there can be nothing to keep you up. Good-night."

Sir Peter went a step or two higher, then

came to a standstill again. "And you may set your mind at rest about that bell, Lance," he said. "I shall go to sleep with it on my mind, and think of it the very first thing in the morning, so don't you trouble about it."

But Lance made no reply this time. He had gone back to the study, and his gloomy thoughts swooping down upon him once more, his ears were shut to Sir Peter's voice.

He leaned moodily against the mantelpiece, staring into the live coals — his thoughts a turmoil so far as the present was concerned, and a blank as to the future.

What was it that had changed Madge so much of late? What was the reason of her extraordinary terror in the churchyard, and, above all, why was it that she had failed, in response to his direct appeal,

to give pledge for pledge, and reciprocate trust with trust? These were the uppermost of the doubts which presented themselves for solution. But below these, sounding a deeper note, were other doubts and questions equally difficult to answer. Did this marriage that he was about to contract with Madge really promise happiness in the future for her, for him, or, to put it on a lower ground, contentment and satisfaction? Had he been wise in thus yielding to Uncle Peter's wishes? Was not the past too real, too living for it to be hurried in this way into its grave of oblivion?

The fire burned low; the lamp on the table grew dim while these thoughts, in slow procession, trooped across his brain. The room was a large one; it seemed all shadows at the farther end, save where the half-open door admitted a faint patch

of lamplight from the dimly-lighted, outer hall.

Across this faint patch of light there suddenly fell a stronger gleam as from a lamp carried by hand. A tremulous hand, too, it must have been, for the gleam wavered; now high, now low, it fell upon the floor.

"It's Uncle Peter back again," thought Lance, leaving his leaning posture at the fireplace and going to the door.

But in the doorway he paused, astonished to see not Sir Peter but Madge descending the broad flight of stairs, in some long, trailing, white gown.

His first thought was that she was walking in her sleep; a second look undeceived him. Her steps were too rapid and unsteady for those of a sleep-walker, also her eyes had not the fixed, staring expression of a dreamer, but were bright

and dancing. The light of her lamp, thrown upward on her face, emphasized its pallid wanness, framed in a cloudy halo of short, dusky, dishevelled hair.

“Why, Madge, what is it?” he cried, advancing to meet her and taking the lamp from her hand.

“I have something to say to you—something I must say at once—to-night, for I cannot live through another night with it unsaid,” answered Madge, in low, unsteady tones, as she passed in front of him into the library.

He followed her in simple, blank astonishment. He set down her lamp on a side table and laid his hand on her shoulder.

“Say on, dear, if it must be said,” he answered, kindly.

And standing thus facing her, and looking down into her troubled face, he was struck with the havoc which sleepless nights

and anxious days had wrought in her. Madge, at her best, would never have been a beauty; but he had been accustomed to see her piquante, radiant, full of animation and spirits. It seemed impossible that aught but years of actual bodily suffering could have sharpened her features in this fashion, traced such rings round her eyes, and lines of care about her mouth.

Her eyes did not meet his as they stood thus. They went wandering hither and thither, now to the dark corners at the farther end of the room, anon to the half-opened door with a searching, terrified look in them.

“What is it, Madge?” he asked. “What do you think you see there?”

And then another fear took possession of him. This might be the first stage of some delirious fever. The right course

would be to get her as quickly as possible back to her room.

He took her hands in his.

"Wouldn't it be better to get back to your room, Madge, and try for some sleep?" he asked. "To-morrow you can tell me anything you like, you know."

Madge did not seem to hear him, though he could feel her thrill to his touch. Her eyes were still wandering from corner to corner, the terror in them deepening.

"Do you see anything?" she asked, presently, in a frightened whisper.

"Nothing—absolutely," he answered, the impression that she was suffering from delirium growing upon him. "Come, Madge, let me see you up the stairs again to your room. It'll soon be morning; try and get an hour or two of sleep."

She drew a long breath and looked up in his face.

“Sleep!” she repeated. “I tell you there will be no sleep for me till I’ve told you the truth—the whole truth from beginning to end!”

She looked down on his hands which still clasped her cold, trembling ones in a warm grasp, and suddenly bowed her head over them, kissing them passionately.

“Oh dear, dear hands!” she cried, brokenly, “how can I speak words which will make them grow cold as death to me!”

Lance grew alarmed.

“I don’t think anything you could tell me would bring that about, Madge,” he answered, gravely; but for all that his heart quaked for what her tale might be.

She looked up in his face piteously.

“Not if I were to tell you—that it was I who drove Jane Shore out of the house and sent her to her death?” she asked,

bringing out the words with difficulty, and with many a pause between them.

His hands let go at once.

"Wh—at!" he cried hoarsely, and he recoiled a step, staring at her blankly.

Madge's breath came in gasps.

"It's true! It's true!" she cried, bringing out her words now in a rush. "I found out her secret, and flashed it out on her, on the night of the ball, in the picture placed opposite the mirror in my boudoir; and—and—you know the rest."

And the confession made now, she sank, trembling, into a chair which stood near, covering her face with her hands.

Lance drew a step nearer. His face had suddenly grown hard, white, rigid.

"Will you be good enough to tell me what that secret was, and how you found it out?" he asked, in a voice that matched his face.

Madge drew her hands from her face, looking up at him wonderingly. Was this Lance's voice, with a ring of iron in it, in place of its usual mellow kindliness.

His set face repeated his question.

Then Madge, with trembling lips, and in a tone so low that it sank at times to a whisper, repeated the story which the newspaper paragraph had told. Once or twice she nearly broke down; it was a hard story to tell to the man standing there facing her, with arms folded on his chest, and white, set face.

Only once he interrupted her to ask the question who had possession of the newspaper now. But that one interruption nearly brought her story to an abrupt ending, and it was with many a halt and a voice that threatened to fail her altogether, that she resumed and told the finish of that ill-fated night of the ball—Jane

Shore's visit to her room, and her farewell threat.

Lance drew a deep breath as she finished speaking, but said never a word.

She clasped her hands together, looking up piteously into his face. "Oh, Lance!" she cried, "do not look at me like that—speak to me, tell me you forgive me now that I have told you the whole truth!"

His face grew harder still. "Will your telling me the whole truth raise her from the dead and give her back to me?" he asked in harsh, cold tones. Then he turned his back on her and went towards the door.

She sprang after him and laid one hand on his arm. "Lance, Lance," she cried passionately, "do not leave me like this! We must not part in this way!"

It was easy to read her sentence in his eyes. They said plainly enough: "Everything is at an end between us! All I ask of

you now is to keep out of my sight to the last hour of my life ! ”

“ Speak to me, speak to me,” she implored, “ one word, just one word of kindness or pity ! ”

“ Kindness ! Pity ! ” he repeated.

Madge’s head drooped. “ I know—I know,” she said, “ what you would say, that I had neither kindness nor pity for her. But if you did but know what I have suffered, what I do suffer——”

Her voice gave way, though her eyes were dry. She bowed her head on the hand which clutched his arm.

“ You could not help forgiving me if you only knew how I have been—how I am punished,” she went on, piteously. “ She has kept her word ; she stood behind me in the churchyard to-night ; she followed me home and sat beside my bed ; she came down the stairs with me.”

She broke off for a moment, then suddenly lifted her face to his once more.

"Look in my face," she said, humbly, pleadingly. "You can see what I have suffered!"

His words came stern and wrathful now.

"You looked in her face and saw what she had suffered; but did that teach you pity?" he asked, striving as he spoke to release his arm from her clasp.

But there had come to her fingers a strength twice their own, and their clasp did not loosen. There rose up in her mind some faint sense of injustice. It seemed as if her great love for him, as well as her suffering, must be written on her face, and plead for her.

"You do not know—you do not understand," she faltered, then broke off.

The story of this great, passionate love

of hers would be even harder to tell than had been the story of her mercilessness to the woman who had threatened to frustrate that love.

"After all these years," she began, then broke off again.

All his reply was the endeavour once more to unloosen her fingers.

She could bear it no longer.

"Oh, Lance, Lance, it was for you, because I loved you," she cried, passionately.

And then tears came to her at last, and she bowed her head once more on his arm.

But it was to be neither rest nor hiding-place for her now. He released himself from her clasping, trembling hands. For once he raised his voice.

"Then I would to Heaven that you had hated me, since your love has done this for me," he said, hotly, turning away from her towards the door once more.

She put herself between him and the door.

“Oh, Lance, Lance,” she implored, “don’t leave me thus ; only say you’ll forgive me, or, if you cannot do that, say you will try to in the years to come—some day, some long way off, perhaps.”

Then she threw herself on her knees at his feet, crying, brokenly :

“Oh, Lance, Lance, kill me, punish me, do anything cruel you please to me, but only tell me you’ll try to forgive me in the years to come. We must not part in this way. In this life we may never set eyes on each other again.”

He put her clasped hands stretched upward to his face away, and passed on to the door. He turned and gave her one farewell look as she crouched on the floor in her tumbled white draperies, her weeping face hidden now in her hands.

“I pray Heaven,” he said in low constrained tones that emphasized his prayer, “that in this life I may never set eyes on your face again.”

CHAPTER II.

MADGE crouched on that floor till day-break, hiding her face in her hands. Not till the cold gray light of early dawn began to find its way in through the chinks of the shutters did she dare to withdraw those hands, lest from out some dark corner there should loom forth a white face and shadowy form.

Her limbs were stiffened, her brain felt dazed, and all power of weeping seemed to have left her, when, at length, she made her way back to her room. All power of feeling seemed to have left her also. Had Lance stood before her once more she could not have raised the feeblest plea for

pity and forgiveness for the Madge Cohen who had sinned and suffered. The reaction from the overstrain of passion was so complete as to seem a positive lull of pain. Over and over again she said to herself, as she threw herself face downwards on her pillows, "He prayed Heaven that he might never see my face again," but the bitter words touched no answering chord now. An odd feeling of drowsiness was beginning to creep over her, and she seemed to feel, think, see, and hear, as it were, through a haze.

As the day grew, sounds of movement about the house began. She heard Lance's footsteps pass along the gallery outside her room.

"Dear footsteps," she said to herself, softly; "I should know them among a thousand."

Then in a dim far-off sort of way she

heard his voice outside below her windows giving some order, and presently the sound of wheels and horses' feet told that his dog-cart was being brought round. She knew in the same dim far-off way that this meant departure; he was going away—for how long she knew not—and she lacked power—and will, too, it seemed now—to prevent him.

For one moment there came to her a sudden wild longing to look her last at him. To see him, as she had seen him so many times before, strong, and beautiful in his strength, driving those strong, beautiful horses would be a sight to thank Heaven for. She made one great effort, gathering together all the strength that was left in her. It was inadequate, however, to carry her to the window. She succeeded in lifting herself from the bed only to fall helplessly into a chair, on whose high back she had

rested her hand for support. And seated there with face turned towards the window, through which the rosy light of morning was now streaming, she heard the crack of Lance's whip, the plunge of his horses, and presently the sound of wheels dying in the distance.

Then drowsiness like a thick cloud seemed to enfold her once more, and thought became a blank to her. And one coming into that room and seeing her seated thus facing the window with head thrown back, and the bright morning sunshine falling on her pale face, might have exclaimed: "One could fancy that sleeping woman was dead!" or another gazing down on her might have said, "Hush, one could fancy that dead woman was sleeping!"

The hour which Madge had passed crouching on the study floor, had been a busy one for Lance. It was in a white heat

of passion that he had shaken her touch from his arm, and turned his back on her ; but it was a white heat that had method and purpose in it. As he had stood listening to her confession, that purpose had formed. The woman he had loved had been surrounded with mystery from the first day he had known her, and the cloud of a terrible suspicion rested on her grave. To clear that mystery, to lift that cloud, should henceforth be the purpose of his life ; till this was accomplished everything else in creation would be as naught to him.

His heart was very bitter against Madge. At that moment it was simply out of his power to form any—even the most shadowy—conception of her great, passionate love for him. He realised only that she had failed in what seemed to him one of woman's best qualities—pity for the forlorn and desolate, and had, by an act of

unexampled cruelty, wrecked his whole life for him. If she had been a man, he said to himself, he would have known how to deal with her ; as it was, her conscience must punish her ; and so he dismissed her from his thoughts.

He left the study with the intention of making immediate preparations for a journey to Corsica, where he purposed fully investigating the attempt at murder with which Madge had associated Miss Shore. Before he started, however, he would see and explain matters to Sir Peter ; also, he would put a few questions to Mr. Stubbs and demand of him the newspaper containing the paragraph from which Madge had drawn inspiration for her picture. Both interviews, he judged, must wait till a later hour. Meantime, he roused his servant, gave sundry directions as to his packing, and transmitted orders to the

stable for his cart to be brought round in time for him to save the first train from Lower Upton.

On his way back from the servants' quarters he had occasion to pass a small room where Madge was accustomed to write her letters, and where had been placed a small davenport for her sole use. A light shining under the door of this room attracted his attention; it seemed to be extinguished at the approach of his footsteps. A suspicion of burglars for one moment flashed across his mind, and he at once opened the door, to find, not burglars, but Mr. Stubbs immediately behind it. This was the same room in which Madge had, upon one occasion, discovered the self-same individual in a listening posture.

Lance stared at the man uncompromisingly; he looked disturbed and flurried.

“What, in the name of fortune, are you doing here at this hour?” cried the young man; and now, for the first time, it occurred to him that, possibly, this man, whom he had been wont to describe as “a harmless old fellow, who did what he was told, and never got into anybody’s way,” was not quite what he had imagined him to be.

“I was just on the point of going to bed, sir; I’ve had a heavy night’s work—I’ve been going through some of Mrs. Cohen’s papers,” here he glanced at the davenport, “at her request, sir.”

Lance still stared hard at the man. He did not see written on his face the fact that Madge’s sudden illness had filled him with consternation, and had sent him listening about the house in the dead of night; that, from what he had heard, he had drawn the inevitable conclusion that

women were undependable allies, and that it was high time he looked to himself, and made provision for the future. All Lance saw in the low brow and narrowing eyes which fronted him was a look of mingled cunning and servility, that filled him with an unutterable contempt, not alone for this miserable specimen of humanity, but also for the woman who could stoop to such a confederate.

"I believe," he said, keeping his eyes fixed contemptuously on the evidently disconcerted Mr. Stubbs, "that Mrs. Cohen has employed you in more than one confidential capacity?"

Mr. Stubbs plucked up courage.

"I am proud to say, sir, I have enjoyed Mrs. Cohen's entire confidence, of late," he replied.

"Very well, then, be so good as to fetch me a newspaper which on one occa-

sion you took the trouble to lay before Mrs. Cohen—it contains the account of an attempt at murder at Santa Maura.”

Mr. Stubbs’s face turned to an ashy whiteness. So, then, his conjectures had been correct. Madge had snapped the alliance between them by making full confession of the part she had played. The question was now, how far she had betrayed his complicity in the matter?

“Did you hear what I said?” asked Lance, his face taking an expression which seemed to Mr. Stubbs a remarkably unpleasant one.

“It’s here, sir ; here, sir,” he said, going to the davenport and taking thence a newspaper, which Lance at once took possession of, “Mrs. Cohen has kept it here ever since I gave it to her. And, sir, will you be so good as to remember that in this matter, from first to last, I

have acted entirely under Mrs. Cohen's orders?"

"I congratulate you on the fidelity with which you have carried them out. May I ask your motive for placing a paragraph of this sort in Mrs. Cohen's hands, instead of in Sir Peter's or mine?"

"I knew Mrs. Cohen's anxiety on the matter, sir; we have been on a very confidential footing, as I've already told you, sir, for some time past. Mrs. Cohen's orders were imperative—I did my best, sir, to carry them out."

Lance, with his wrath against Madge still at white heat, began to see a sufficient reason for the appointment of this wretched being to the lucrative post of land-steward at Redesdale.

What Mr. Stubbs considered an unpleasant expression of countenance deepened on his face.

"I have only this to say," he said, contemptuously, as he folded the newspaper and put it in his pocket, "I shall advise Sir Peter to send you about your business as quickly as possible, and you may thank your stars that you are an old man, instead of a young one, otherwise I should send you out of the house a little quicker than Sir Peter could." Then he turned on his heel and left the man to his own reflections.

Five o'clock was striking as Lance went along the gallery towards his own room. With the last stroke of the clock, Sir Peter's door opened and Sir Peter, fully dressed, came out.

"What, you there, Lance?" he cried. "Now, isn't it a good thing I can wake myself at any hour I choose? If I had depended upon Simmonds I should be sound asleep still, and there's that church

bell and a hundred other things to see to before breakfast——”

Lance laid his hand on the old gentleman's shoulder.

“Come into my room for a few minutes, Uncle Peter, I've something to say to you,” he said.

“Eh?” said Sir Peter, blithely, “no doubt you have, my boy! I dare say, like me, you've a good many things on your mind just now—not to be wondered at in a bridegroom elect.”

He, a bridegroom elect! From his haggard look and disordered appearance it would have been easier to believe that he had been making preparations for his funeral than for his wedding.

Lance lost no time in preamble.

“There'll be no wedding to-day, nor any other day, so far as I am concerned,” he said, as he shut the door behind Sir

Peter ; “I am going away, at once, to Corsica.”

“At once! to Corsica!” repeated Sir Peter, utterly unable to credit his senses.

“Yes, I shall start in about half an hour’s time. I have something to do there—read this”—here he handed the newspaper to Sir Peter—“I have just heard, for the first time, that Miss Shore is supposed to be the person who made the attempt at murder there related. I shall make it my business to prove the supposition false.”

But Sir Peter’s senses were still beclouded. “Miss Shore—attempt at murder—I don’t understand,” he repeated, blankly.

Lance grew impatient. “If you’ll read that paragraph, you will understand—I’ve no time to go into details; I tell you, simply, I’m off to Corsica at once, to do

my utmost to clear the reputation of a young lady who was once a guest in this house."

Sir Peter, recollecting a certain half-hour he had spent with Lance at Liverpool, began to understand. "But, my dear boy, what will Madge say——"

"Madge has said all she has to say on the matter—to me," interrupted Lance, sharply; "and I may as well tell you at once that everything is at an end between Madge and me."

"No, no, no! my dear boy," cried Sir Peter, "no, no, not possible! You don't mean to say—you can't—that there's to be no wedding this morning?"

Lance crossed the room and stood in front of Sir Peter.

"Uncle Peter," he said, "look in my face and see that I mean every word I

say ; I would put a bullet through my brain sooner than marry Madge Cohen."

But Uncle Peter could not look steadily in the young man's face, his eyes were beginning to blink very hard, and for the moment he dared not trust his voice.

There came a rap at the door, and a servant announced that the cart was brought round.

Lance hailed thankfully an excuse for cutting his farewell short. "I'll write to you from Dover," he said ; "I shall most likely have an hour or two to wait there. Shake hands, Uncle Peter, there's nothing for you to break your heart over." This was added a little bitterly, with emphasis on the pronoun.

Uncle Peter held out his hand ; once, twice he cleared his throat very loudly, but still words would not come.

Lance's hard, even voice was a curious contrast to the old gentleman's want of self-control. "I would suggest that you should take the blame of the broken engagement on yourself," said the young man; "it will be easy for you to say that you did not consider that I, in my changed position, was a suitable match for Madge, with her wealth—it might save any feeling of wounded pride on her part."

There was a touch of sarcasm in his voice as he said the last words. But, for all that, there was no doubt that he meant them. He might, in his wrath, have prayed for the right to kill her, as she stood confessing the deed she had done; he would never have prayed for the right to confer an insult on her.

The words "In my changed position"

brought back Sir Peter's voice, though but a quaking, tremulous voice.

"Lance," he said, huskily, holding the young man's hand in a tight grip, "wherever you go, whatever you do, don't forget what I said to you a little while ago, that if you do not take the place of my eldest son now, you take that of my youngest and best-loved—best-loved, do you hear, Lance?"

"Thank you, Uncle Peter. At present the future is a blank to me ; but I shall always be glad to remember your farewell words."

"And, Lance," the old gentleman went on, still holding Lance's hand in his, "you'll draw your supplies as usual ; you won't let this—this make any difference?"

Lance's reply was short and all but inaudible.

Then he wrenched his hand away and was gone.

And Sir Peter, after gazing blankly at the closed door for a moment or two, sat down and cried like a child over his broken toys.

CHAPTER III.

THAT was to be a day of departures. Sir Peter had scarcely time to dry his eyes and reflect on what a harassing day's work he would have to get through, before Mr. Stubbs, equipped for travelling, presented himself.

If Sir Peter had not been so occupied with his own depressing subjects of thought he would have noticed the anxious look on the man's face, the nervous twitching of the corners of his mouth.

"I've come to say good-bye, Sir Peter. I suppose I had better start at once," he said, looking this way, that way; all ways; but never once at Sir Peter.

“Eh! what! You going, too, Stubbs?” ejaculated Sir Peter, trying all in a moment to collect his thoughts and arrange some settled plan for meeting the day’s difficulties.

The warmth of Sir Peter’s greeting reassured Mr. Stubbs. Things had happened then as he had surmised they might—Mr. Clive had been so occupied with his own affairs that he had forgotten to give Sir Peter the warning he had threatened respecting the rascality of the man he employed to open his letters.

“I think the sooner I start the better, if you’ve no objection, Sir Peter,” he replied. “You see, I enter upon my duties at Redesdale, in ten days’ time. You were good enough to tell me I might take a ten days’ holiday before I got to work there——”

“Yes, yes; I remember, my good friend. Take a holiday, and welcome; but——”

Here he broke off, and began what, compared with his usual quick tramp backwards and forwards, was a veritable funeral march from end to end of the room.

"I will make it my business, before anything else," Mr. Stubbs went on, "to inquire fully into the antecedents of the gentleman who has been recommended as my successor here, and, meantime, there is the lad the Vicar spoke of."

"Yes, yes, I know; but I was thinking whether I could do without you to-day. I've a very great deal to see to and arrange."

Sir Peter paused abruptly in his walk. Now, how far should he take Mr. Stubbs into his confidence on this very delicate matter?

"Do you refer to the wedding arrangements?" asked Mr. Stubbs, scanning furtively Sir Peter's anxious features.

"No, no. I fear—a—h'm—I greatly fear, Stubbs, the wedding will have to be put off—for a time, that is."

"Put off, sir!" This was said with a great show of surprise. "May I ask if anything unforeseen has occurred?"

Sir Peter thought for a moment. The only way he could see out of his difficulties that day was by the juvenile course of fibbing. He must fib prodigiously all day long, he said to himself, so he might as well begin at once.

"No, no; nothing unforeseen has happened. I'm sorry to say I've noticed for some time past, that Mrs. Cohen's health has been failing, and by my express advice—my advice, do you see, Mr. Stubbs?—the wedding will be deferred till she pulls round a little."

"I see, Sir Peter. And Mr. Clive has started off, I suppose, for Carstairs, to get

further medical advice?" asked Mr. Stubbs, still furtively regarding Sir Peter.

"Exactly, exactly," ejaculated Sir Peter. "Splendid idea, that," he thought to himself, "I'll enlarge upon it." "At least," he went on, "I advised that course; but Mr. Clive said: 'No, there's not a man in Carstairs I'd trust in a case like this; I shall go straight to London and consult a man there who makes fainting fits a speciality.'"

And then the old gentleman sighed and thought to himself:

"Dear me, I wonder if I shall forget all that, and say something quite different before the day's out!"

Mr. Stubbs was all sympathy.

"I fear it will be a harassing time for you, Sir Peter; I would willingly stay on a day or two longer, but I've some pressing private affairs of my own——"

“Ah yes, that boy of yours ; I remember you told me all about him, and I promised you a cheque, didn’t I, in addition to your pay ?”

“I should be very grateful for it, Sir Peter ; I’m outfitting him now for the Colonies, and, as I told you, I should like to give him a little capital to start with.’

“Ah, yes ; I remember. Come into the study a minute, you shall have your cheque at once ; and don’t forget, if any one asks you about the wedding being put off, it’s all my doing, on account of Mrs. Cohen’s health, and Mr. Clive has gone to Carstairs —no, to London, I mean, to consult a leading doctor about her.”

So Mr. Stubbs departed with a handsome cheque in addition to his handsome quarterly salary. And if any one had taken the trouble to watch his movements on his arrival at Carstairs, they might have

seen that, instead of taking a ticket direct for London as he had told Sir Peter he intended to do, he made Liverpool his destination.

Sir Peter's fibs grew in number and variety as the day went on. Lady Judith unintentionally gave an impetus to them.

About seven o'clock she rustled downstairs in an extra allowance of skirt and floating lace lappets, expecting to find arrangements for the wedding in a satisfactory state of progress. The hints which her maid had let fall during the process of dressing as to a troubled condition of the household atmosphere, had been uttered so timorously that they had not arrested her attention.

Sir Peter met her at the foot of the stairs, feeling that the sooner she was put into possession of the leading facts of the matter the better.

“Madge is not down—she is no better,” he shouted into her ears. “Wedding must be put off—I’ve sent for the Vicar.”

Lady Judith was all startled attention in a moment.

“This comes of doing things in a hurry——” she began.

Sir Peter knew that a sermon would follow on this text, but did not feel in the mood to personate an audience.

“Lance has gone to London to consult doctors—bring back one with him,” he shouted again.

“Lance gone — where ? Bring back whom ?” questioned the lady, only catching half his sentence.

“Stubbs has gone off, too—to London,” Sir Peter went on, anxious to put her in possession of all the facts necessary for her to know in as short a space of time as possible.

“What, Stubbs and Lance are gone off together?”

“No, not together, one after the other.”

“What, Lance has gone off after Stubbs! Another *protégé* has disappeared! They do you credit, Sir Peter, I must say, these *protégés* of yours! First one, then another! They make themselves at home in the house, and get all they can out of you, and then they disappear and commit suicide, or do something else disgraceful. And as for Lance going in pursuit of the man, I do think——”

“No, no, no,” shouted Sir Peter, “Stubbs is right enough—Lance—too.” Then he tip-toed, and with a stentorian voice, added —“Gone—after—doctors.”

And it was not until Lady Judith had commenced an oration on the folly of two men starting in quest of one doctor—before which he beat a hasty retreat—

that he realised the fact that his story had already slightly deviated from its original form.

But later on in the day when he began seriously to consider the state of affairs, the reality of the estrangement between Lance and Madge, and the difficulties which might lie in the way of putting things once more on an amicable footing between them, it occurred to him that an even greater modification of his original statement was necessary.

The Vicar, who was to have performed the wedding ceremony, was looked upon as the fountain-head of gossip in the neighbourhood ; to him, therefore, it would be necessary to tell a story which the county would be expected to credit, as a true statement of affairs.

So when the worthy clergyman, in response to a hurried note from Sir Peter,

presented himself at the Castle, the story to which he was asked to give credence was that Sir Peter had taken advantage of the weak state of Mrs. Cohen's health to defer a marriage, which, since the change in Mr. Clive's position, was scarcely so desirable a match for her as it had at one time seemed.

"Heaven help me!" sighed the old gentleman, buttoning up his coat and going for a weary little trot by himself in the Park. "How I'm to remember all these different stories and stick to the right one to the right person, is more than I know!"

Before, however, that day came to an end, Sir Peter had ceased to trouble about the number and variety of his fibs, in fact, had no heart left in him for fibs of any sort.

About noon a message was brought to him from Madge that she wished to see him at once and alone. Sir Peter went up

to her room to find her seated in the same high-backed chair into which she had fallen in her endeavour to get a last glimpse of Lance. There her maid had found her on resuming her attendance at seven o'clock in the morning, and seated thus she had endured a disturbing quarter of an hour of Lady Judith's society. Neither the maid nor Lady Judith, however, had read in Madge's face the story of her utterly broken physical health ; to both she had protested a little feebly, it might be, that she felt better and would be quite herself before the day was over. Sir Peter was not a sharp-sighted man, and as a rule nothing was easier than to persuade him into taking an optimistic view of the gloomiest situation. On this occasion, however, his first look into Madge's face put all optimistic views to flight, and sent him to her side with a pained, startled cry on his lips :

“My child, my child, what is it—what has pulled you down in this way?”

Madge was still in the long, white gown she had worn overnight. Her hair strayed in loose disorder about her white face. Her head leaned wearily on one hand, the other rested on the arm of the chair.

“Hasn’t Broughton been to see you, my child? He must be sent for at once!” pursued Sir Peter, making for the bell there and then to give orders for the immediate attendance of the doctor.

Madge’s voice arrested him; it sounded weak, and far away—so far away, indeed, that he could almost have fancied that she was speaking to him from the other side of a wall.

“Not now, not yet. Will you sit down a moment? I have something to say to you—to confess to you,” she added, *correctingly*.

‘I know all, my child ; Lance has told me,” said Sir Peter, hurriedly, thinking that he knew to what she referred.

Then as he looked down into her haggard face with something written on it which he had never seen there before, he uttered his first and only reproach against Lance.

“Why is not Lance here ?” he cried. “It’s disgraceful that with you in this state he should start off on a wild fancy of his own !”

Madge sighed. “Lance was right to go ; if he had not gone I must——”

She broke off for a moment. Then she took Sir Peter’s hand in hers. “Will you sit down and listen to me ?” she said, faintly. “It isn’t the story I told Lance—it won’t take long to tell.”

Sir Peter, with a scared look on his face, sat down. And Madge, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, and in a monotone like

that of a child repeating a weary lesson, told the story of how she had tampered with the old gentleman's correspondence, and had kept back the tidings of Gervase Critchett's only boy.

Straightforwardly and simply she told the tale. On Mr. Stubbs's share in the matter she touched but lightly—she had no wish to claim palliation for her offence by magnifying his share in it.

“He would have done anything I told him to do for money,” she said, simply, in reply to Sir Peter's astonished exclamation, “Stubbs did that!”

Her last word left her without voice wherein to plead for forgiveness. And Sir Peter had no voice wherewith to utter it; but all the same she knew that it lay in his heart for her. And he knew that she knew it was there without any telling on his part.

CHAPTER IV.

THE other half of a great love is a great humility. Great love knows nothing of self-seeking, self-justification, nor of that miserable plea which little love is so apt to set up, "half my transgression must lie at your door."

Madge's love for Lance, measured by her humility, must have been great indeed. No word of self-justification, from first to last, ever escaped her lips. Not once did she set up, as she very well might have done, the plea, "I did it for Lance." In good truth she felt she had done so badly for the man she loved, that the less she said about it the better. Even what she

had purposed she had failed to perform, either through too little courage, or too much conscience. She had put out her hand, as it were, to stop the wheels of fate, with this only result—that her fingers had been crushed in her weak endeavour.

For a day or two she kept her room, dispensing, however, with the doctor's attendance and seeing not a soul but her maid. When she once more joined the family circle she looked literally the ghost of her old bright self. She had never learned the art of the economy of the emotions, and sooner or later her sensitive, passionate nature seemed bound to wear out the slight frame that held it. Sir Peter stood looking at her aghast as she sat under multitudinous wraps shivering beside a huge fire. Her voice, too, as she answered his greeting, thrilled him as the touch of a dead hand might; it was cold,

tuneless, far-away, the sort of voice that one lying at the gates of death, and only saved by a miracle from passing through them, might be supposed to bring back to life with him.

Sir Peter fussed a good deal over her that day, suggested all sorts of plans for bringing back the roses to her cheeks, ran over a list of German 'Bads and Swiss Spas as desirable places for her to winter in. Madge listened to him quietly.

"I have made up my mind where to go," she answered, "it will be to Seville—I hope to get away next week."

Sir Peter was all astonishment; his questions came in a string.

Madge put them on one side, unanswered. It would have been difficult to make him see, in the fact of there being at Seville a convent ruled by an Abbess with whom Madge had some slight acquaintance, a

sufficient reason for her choice of that city as a place of abode. Yet such was the case. In that convent Madge saw a refuge from the terrors of her conscience which conjured out of every dark corner the face or the form of the woman she believed she had driven to her death. Atonement for this was denied her; but penance still lay in her power, and penance she eagerly grasped at, even though it might involve the necessity for the abandonment of the faith of her childhood.

This Spanish convent was one of the strictest of its order, and Madge knew well enough what rigorous discipline would be included in a life of penitence within its walls. But what matter, if it did hurry her a little faster out of the world than she felt herself going already? Her purpose was fixed, never again in this life to meet the look of Lance's wrathful eyes.

The greatest kindness she could confer on him, and on all her friends, now, it seemed to her, would be, without any fuss of leave-taking, to creep quietly out of life. And if, as she made her way towards the dark valley, she could lose the sense of that pursuing shape which filled her days with terror and rendered her nights so many waking nightmares, she would feel that Heaven had bestowed a blessing upon her such as she had no right to demand.

Madge did something else besides expedite her departure for Spain—sent for a lawyer from Carstairs, and gave to him full instructions for the making of a will which assigned to Lance the whole of the property she had a right to leave away from the Cohen family.

Sir Peter had to be let into the secret of this will, in order that his consent to act as executor to it might be obtained.

He fussed a good deal over the affair ; there seemed a gloom and a mystery about Madge's doings just then, which acted like a douche of cold water on the bright little fire of hope, that he was perpetually trying to stir into a flame. It was not easy for him to discard his lifelong habit of looking at the cheerful side of things ; at the same time, he was bound to admit that there seemed little enough just then upon which to build his cheerfulness.

Wet, wintry weather set in, and the old gentleman felt that little by little his cheerfulness was, as it were, slipping through his fingers.

" If I could but smoke, it would be something to do," he sighed, looking out drearily from successive windows at the dismal landscape of mountains, half-hidden in mist, leaden sky pouring down rain in sheets, woods already half-stripped of their foliage.

He furtively repeated his juvenile efforts

to master the mysteries of tobacco ; was compelled to abandon them for reasons which had obtained in his youthful days ; and was driven to find other outlets for his energies.

He went about the house ordering big fires to be made wherever there chanced to be a vacant fireplace ; sent for a man from Carstairs, and another from Edinburgh, to supply him with plans for increasing the heating apparatus of the corridors and larger rooms. Lady Judith, debarred from her outdoor pastoral amusements, added not a little to his discomfiture by generally superintending his occupations. She complained loudly of the extra warmth he was putting into the house, armed herself with a huge fire-screen in lieu of a fan, and informed everybody on every possible opportunity that she “suffered so from the heat.”

The letter received from Lance, written

in a railway-carriage on his way to Marseilles, did not mend matters. Madge's name was not so much as mentioned in it; in fact, it seemed written for the whole and sole purpose of saying that he had forgotten to say what a rascal Stubbs was, and that he hoped Sir Peter would get rid of him as soon as possible; the man he was certain had been playing a double game, and he would "stake his life"—these were Lance's words—"that there was no foundation in fact for the evil suspicion he had chosen to fasten upon a young lady who was an utter stranger to him."

Lance in this letter said not a word as to his plans, so Sir Peter naturally concluded that they remained unaltered. A second letter, however, which arrived two days after—when they imagined him to be tossing about on the Mediterranean—

showed that these plans had been completely reversed. It was a hasty line, written in pencil, during the railway journey back from Marseilles. In it Lance explained the reason for this return journey. The conviction of Stubbs's rascality had been gradually gaining ground in his mind, he said, and now had taken such hold of him, that, before setting off for Corsica, he thought it wiser to run over to Liverpool and thoroughly test the man's statements as to what had taken place there.

He would himself see and question the local authorities, whose names Stubbs had used so freely; and he could now only wonder over his own and Sir Peter's simplicity in not having adopted such a course before.

It was possible that Stubbs's elaborate accounts of his interview with the municipal and cemetery authorities at

Liverpool might be equally unworthy of belief ; no one had been at pains to verify them.

As for the empty purse, the envelope with the name, Jane Shore, upon it, and the handkerchief, any one might produce the two first and assign them to any one he pleased ; and the last, the handkerchief, could be easily obtainable by a man who would hunt through waste-paper baskets, and listen at keyholes.

If in any way, he added, he found his suspicions of Stubbs verified, he would at once place the matter in the hands of the police. He supposed Sir Peter would have no objection to his doing this. In conclusion, he gave an address to which letters might be sent, and begged Sir Peter to consider his communication as strictly confidential, "for," he added, "if the rascal gets an idea that he is suspected, no doubt he will be off at once."

Sir Peter felt his head go round. The man he had trusted with his private correspondence, his cash-book, his cheque-book, to turn out a rascal! In his heart, the old gentleman did not object to a spice of roguery in his *protégés*—it added, so to speak, a piquancy to the exercise of his benevolence. This that Lance charged Stubbs with, however, was downright villainy, which, instead of adding piquancy to his benevolence, took the flavour out of it altogether.

It seemed past belief, yet it was not easy to shake off the impression which Lance's strongly-expressed opinions had made upon him. It was altogether bewildering. The worst part was having to keep the whole thing a secret. He would do his best; but still, if it should ooze out that his faith in his late secretary had had a severe shock—well, he dared say no very great harm would be done after all.

He could not resist the temptation of hinting to Madge that possibly it might be as well to reconsider the appointment of Stubbs to the land-stewardship at Redesdale.

Madge turned away wearily from the subject.

“The lawyers will see after that,” she said. “Let him go. I don’t want even to think of him.”

In good truth to her—with the thoughts she had in her heart at that moment—Stubbs and his rascality seemed to be of colossal insignificance.

It may reasonably be doubted whether Sir Peter’s power of keeping a secret would have stood the strain put upon it had not a second letter arrived which, for the moment, threw Lance’s communication into the shade.

It was received two days before the day which Madge had fixed for her departure

to the South. She had spent the morning with Sir Peter at his writing-table, going through various matters connected with her Durham property, in the management of which Sir Peter had promised to be her representative during her absence.

“Of course, my dear, I’ll do my best in your affairs,” he said, “but my hands, as you know, are very full just now!”

They were literally very full at the moment with the unopened letters which the morning’s post had brought him.

To emphasize his statement, he began breaking seals and opening envelopes very fast, keeping up a light flow of talk as he did so.

“Better open this first,” he soliloquised, fingering a black-edged envelope; “dare say it’s from a widow with six or seven children, whom she wants to place out in life or get into schools.”

Madge, looking down on the envelope which he threw on the table, recognised the handwriting of the Rev. Joshua Parker.

“Eh! What’s this?” cried Sir Peter, dropping his letter and turning a startled, white face towards Madge. “Read it, my dear, read it—I don’t seem able to take it in.”

Madge picked up the letter and read a few short lines from the Rev. Joshua Parker, enclosing, with many regrets, a letter which the Australian mail had just brought to him. It was from the Wesleyan minister who had succeeded him in his charge at Rutland Bay, and after a brief preamble on the duty of resignation to the will of Heaven, told the sad news of the death of Gervase Critchett, of colonial fever, within a month of the departure of the Rev. Joshua Parker from the colony. Full details, the writer stated, would be sent by the next mail.

Sir Peter rubbed his forehead. "I'm all in a maze," he said; "I get a nephew one mail, I lose him the next! I can't realise it, eh, Madge."

Madge said nothing. She realised it sharply enough, and with it realised something else also, that all her careful thought for Lance, her plotting and subterfuges had been after all but so much winnowing of the wind and ploughing of the ocean.

CHAPTER V.

“ I’VE told you all I can remember of the dear boy—you shall see any subsequent accounts that may come to me from Rutland Bay detailing his illness,” said the Rev. Joshua Parker, addressing Sir Peter. “ He was always fragile and delicate—that picture, though a little roughly done, is as like him as could be.”

The Rev. Joshua Parker had followed his letter to the Castle within twenty-four hours, and now sat narrating to Sir Peter the story of Gervase Critchett’s brief life.

The minister’s tall, thin figure presented a striking contrast to Sir Peter’s short, stout one. He had large features and

solemn gray eyes. There was one point of resemblance between the two men—a bald patch on the top of the head in the region of the organ of benevolence, which suggested the idea that the excessive use of that organ had destroyed the roots of the hair.

Sir Peter took up the roughly-executed photograph once more. It was that of a boy of a Greek type of beauty, with large, dreamy eyes, and an abundance of curly hair.

“Poor Gervase!” he sighed. “The image of his father! He would have brought back my young days to me!” And then he sighed again.

The minister sighed too. “It is a mysterious dispensation of Providence; a grievous blow to you, Sir Peter, no doubt, and to me also. When I passed this way a month ago and looked up at your Castle, high among the Fells, I said to myself, ‘I

shall soon be bringing glad tidings to the master of that house ;’ and lo, instead——” he broke off abruptly. There could be no doubt as to the strength of the bond which had existed between him and the orphan boy.

“ You passed this way a month ago ? ” queried Sir Peter, feeling the necessity of a brief respite from the sad subject. Then, as the recollection of Madge’s pitiful confession of a second abstracted letter crossed his mind, he added, hurriedly : “ Ah, yes ! yes, I remember ; it must have been just about the time of my birthday festivities.”

“ It was just after, Sir Peter. I arrived at Liverpool, on my way to Upton, on the morning of the twenty-second. I remember, during the ensuing week, reading an account of your birthday festivities in a Cumberland paper.”

“ Ah, you should have been here and

taken part in them ; we kept things going merrily for nearly a week."

"I should have been at Upton during that week had not my plans been entirely changed by an extraordinary occurrence."

"An extraordinary occurrence !" repeated Sir Peter, all eager curiosity in a moment.

But instead of attempting to satisfy that curiosity, Mr. Parker leaned forward in his chair, fixed his solemn eyes full upon Sir Peter, and said, sententiously :

"Once I was a gardener's boy !"

Sir Peter jumped to his feet with a spring, and laid his hand on the minister's shoulder. "Ah," he said, delightedly, "and some benevolent person rescued you from that position, educated you, and sent you forth to teach and to preach ?"

Mr. Parker shook his head. "Not a bit of it, I have only myself to thank for the

choice of a calling with which I am thoroughly in harmony."

Sir Peter walked away to the window.

Mr. Parker's next words brought him back at a run. They were:

"Have you ever studied the theory of transplanting, Sir Peter?"

"Transplanting, transplanting!" repeated Sir Peter. "That's one of the many things I have not yet, through pressure of occupation, been able to give a thought to."

As he said this, it flashed into the old gentleman's mind that the "theory of transplanting," as propounded by the Rev. Joshua Parker, might be a thoroughly congenial one; and instantly there rose up before him a vision of backgrounds of shrubs, and foregrounds of flowers, removed from one corner of the Castle grounds to another, and if they didn't do there, to somewhere else.

"People frequently," the minister continued, "carry out the principles of an art without giving much thought to them. I in my young days not only carried out the principles of the art of transplanting, but thought about them and built a theory on them."

"Ah, an ingenious, thoughtful lad!" said Sir Peter, thinking what a *protégé* this gardener's boy would have made.

"One of the wisest of our statesmen made a noteworthy remark about the uselessness of 'matter in its wrong place.' I never saw a shrub or flower that needed sunshine pining in the shade, or *vice versâ*, without thinking of it. The thing that in its right place would have been a joy and a beauty, and so have played the part it was meant to play in the scheme of creation, was, in its wrong place, simply so much inert, useless matter."

"Ah," murmured Sir Peter, "I'll get you

to make the round of my flower-garden while you're here. You might make a few suggestions."

The minister went on.

"After a time my eye, trained to detect matter in its wrong place, wandered from plants to the men and women about me. As with the plants, so I found it with my fellow-creatures; and I came to the conclusion that half the sins and the miseries of the human race arose from the fact of people being planted amid unsuitable surroundings."

"And you tried your hand at transplanting men and women," cried Sir Peter, excitedly, now thoroughly convinced that the subject was a congenial one.

"I did my best, Sir Peter, but that was little enough. My eye, trained to detect want of harmony between person and place, suggested more work than my feeble hands

could accomplish. In fact, to have accomplished one quarter of it, I must have played the part of Providence to the community generally."

"And a very good part to play, too, my dear sir," said Sir Peter, sympathetically.

"But so much beyond my capabilities," replied the minister, "that, after I adopted my sacred calling, I was almost driven to regret the power my eye had acquired of detecting matter in its wrong place. I was perpetually tormented with a desire to set things straight." Sir Peter's face here became aglow. "There were peers of the realm I should like to have transplanted from their grand houses to costermongers' cellars, and there were hewers of wood and drawers of water whom I would have made peers of the realm. It was this sense of the fitness of things that made me say, so soon as I set eyes on Gervase Critchett:

‘That boy is out of place among working men.’ And on the very evening that I was starting for Upton—what’s the matter, my dear sir ; do you suffer from cramp ? ”

“ A trifle now and then,” said Sir Peter, giving one or two vigorous stamps ; “ I’ve been sitting still a good bit this morning—ever since I’ve been listening to you. How would it be to take a turn outside on the terrace ? The wind has lulled a bit. After all, it’s only a sou-wester.”

Only a sou’-wester ! But that sou’-wester had done its work well during the night, as the stripped trees and battered flower-beds in the garden testified. The damaged sea-wall also below St. Cuthbert’s church had a tale to tell, of the combined fury of wind and wave, and the fishing-boats, drawn up high on the beach, showed that the weather-wise fishermen knew well enough that that fury was as yet but half spent.

Just now, however, as Sir Peter had said, the sou'-wester was taking a rest, and the terrace, under a fitful noon-day sun, looked a fairly-tempting promenade.

Mr. Parker made a brief exclamation as to the wind-swept clearness and beauty of the surrounding landscape.

"You were saying an unusual occurrence took place at Liverpool," said Sir Peter, eager as a child to get the finish of what promised to be an interesting story.

"Ah, yes! I was saying that just as I had detected the want of harmony between Gervase Critchett and his surroundings, so did I, on the night of my arrival at Liverpool, detect the incongruity of another person—this time a young woman—with her surroundings."

"Ah, a young woman!"

"I had been spending the evening with a brother minister, and, as I was going back

rather late to my hotel, I met a policeman with a young woman in his charge. Now there are some people who look in their right place on their road to a police-station in charge of the police, and one is delighted to leave them to the surroundings that so admirably become them. But a single glance at this young woman's face showed me that whatever might be her right place, assuredly it was not within the walls of a prison."

"Ah! Good-looking girl, eh?"

"It was not her good looks, but the utter forlornness and hopelessness of her expression that at first attracted me. I caught sight of her face beneath a gas-lamp—it was haggard, death-like in its pallor; a quantity of jet-black hair hung about it. She was dressed entirely in long, limp, gray garments. I could have fancied some poor soul bidden against its will to come forth from the tomb, looking much as she looked."

Sir Peter stopped abruptly in his walk.

“Forlorn-looking, pallid, with jet-black hair,” he repeated thoughtfully. “Dressed all in gray too, and on the night after my birthday !”

All Lance’s ugly suspicions of Stubbs’s double dealing at Liverpool seemed suddenly to have substance given to them.

On some one else’s ear beside Sir Peter’s the minister’s narrative had fallen with startling effect. Madge, wrapped in her furs, was standing in the parapet-balcony where once Miss Shore had knelt, addressing her piteous prayer for mercy to the star-lit heavens. Preparations for the journey to Spain were now complete, and on that very afternoon, Madge, accompanied only by her maid, intended to set forth. She was standing now in that balcony of painful memories, looking her farewell to the beautiful landscape tricked

by the fitful sunshine into a transient semblance of a summer smile.

“Good-bye, you dear lanes, where Lance and I have had so many canters together! Good-bye, dear stream, where we used to fish and boat through the summer mornings! Good-bye, dear woods; good-bye, dear hills,” she was saying to herself.

Spain, it is true, might own to landscapes far more magnificent than this; but only between the bars of a convent window would she catch glimpses of them, and—this it was that would take the colour and glory out of them all—there would be nothing of Lance in them.

Thus her thoughts ran, when suddenly the minister’s story, summed up by Sir Peter, reached her ears, and forthwith the landscape became a blank to her, and her heart seemed to stand still, as she leaned over the parapet above the speakers in

intense, painful eagerness to catch what was to follow.

Sir Peter was eager for the sequel also. "What was she charged with, tell me—you did not let her go to prison?" he asked.

"I put the first of your questions to a man—a dock labourer, who followed them," answered Mr. Parker. "He told me that she had made a most determined attempt to commit suicide from the deck of a steamer under repair in one of the docks. That it was only by the merest chance that the attempt had been frustrated. He had remained behind on this steamer till late in the evening, in order to finish some work, and by main force had held the girl back from her attempt to jump over its side into the basin——"

There came a low, startled cry from the balcony at this moment; and, before Sir

Peter had time to realise who it was that stood there, Madge was beside him with clasped hands praying for the finish of the story. "She is alive, only tell me that," she prayed, with blanched cheeks and quivering lips.

Mr. Parker looked astonished. "Did you know her—Etelka McIvor?" he asked. "She said that she had not a friend in the world."

"She is alive, only tell me that!" implored Madge.

"Yes, she is alive and in safe keeping. I attended the next day at the police-court when she was charged with the attempt at suicide. No friends came forward to claim her, so I made myself known to the magistrate and volunteered to charge myself with her safe keeping."

Madge leaned against the stone balustrade of the terrace. This sudden reprieve from

the sentence of her condemning conscience was almost more than she could bear.

Stubbs's story then from beginning to end was a fabrication! The chances were that the man or his confederate had traced the girl to Liverpool, and had there lost sight of her. With an eye to a comfortable provision for himself in the future, and taking it for granted that Jane Shore would never again make her appearance at Upton, he had then fabricated what seemed to him a fitting end to the tragic story, and one most likely to conduce to the fulfilment of Madge's wishes—a necessary condition this in order to the bringing about of the aforesaid comfortable provision for himself.

The insertion of the false statement in the Liverpool newspaper would be a matter of easy accomplishment to him, for the double reason that such sad stories were of daily occurrence in the place, and that his

former connection with the Liverpool Press made ways and means ready to his hand.

All this in quick succession passing through Madge's brain, and coming hand in hand with her sudden revulsion of feeling, for the moment deprived her of the power of speech.

It was not so with Sir Peter ; his ready exclamations and questions flowed in a stream.

“My dear sir, this is good news—I've not had better for many a day past ! Lance will be overjoyed——”

Here he broke off, and looked at Madge.

“But you found a home for her, of course ?” he went on, cheerily, after a moment. “Now tell us everything that happened—all you found out about her from beginning to end.”

“Yes, I found a home for her. I took

her first of all to the wife of the Wesleyan minister whom I knew intimately in Liverpool. A worthy woman she was, with eleven small children, and neither nurse nor maid-servant in the house. Now here there will be plenty of occupation, I thought, for the young lady. If she has a kind heart, and is grateful for her rescue from death, she will set to work with a will to help this poor Christian mother with her many burthens."

Sir Peter fumbled in his pocket, and presently produced from a letter-case an indelible pencil and a telegraph-form, two things, it may be remarked, which went as regularly into his pocket every morning as his purse or pocket-handkerchief.

"If you'll give me the address of that worthy woman, I think I'll send Miss Shore—ah, Miss McIvor, I mean—a few words of—of congratulation on——"

“She is not there now,” interrupted Mr. Parker; “and if you’ll allow me to make the suggestion, she is not in the frame of mind at the present moment to appreciate congratulations, however kindly intentioned they may be.”

Sir Peter looked disappointed as he put away his pencil; then a bright idea came to him, and he took it out again and began scribbling on his telegraph-form, making a writing-pad of his letter-case.

“Lance will be glad to know,” he muttered half to himself.

Madge thought her ears must have played her false.

“Lance is on the Mediterranean?” she exclaimed.

“No, no, my dear; at Liverpool. Ah, you didn’t know—there, I’ve let it out—it doesn’t much matter. He altered his mind, I’m glad to say—came back from Marseilles,

and is now at Liverpool investigating—ah well, investigating—something!”

Madge needed no further telling. In a flash of thought she pictured Lance at his dreary work at Liverpool—searching grave records, hearing perhaps a hundred sad stories in order to prove one false. She pictured the rush of joy which Sir Peter’s telegram would bring him at his hopeless task.

“Let me send it,” she pleaded, laying her hand on the old gentleman’s arm. “I should like it to go signed with my name.”

It seemed to her that the one who had so nearly wrecked the man’s happiness for him, might well be the one to send to him the glad tidings that her endeavours had been futile as well as misguided. Her message was a brief one :

“She is not dead. Come back at once.—
MADGE.”

CHAPTER VI.

LATER on in the day, Madge and Sir Peter were to hear the story of Etelka McIvor, otherwise Jane Shore, so far as it had been confided to the Wesleyan minister.

It was a testimony to the aptitude of the Rev. Joshua Parker for winning the confidence of his fellow-creatures that he should have succeeded in drawing from lips so reserved a story fraught with such bitter memories.

Possibly, however, the supposition that she was lying on her death-bed, and the natural wish not to pass all unknown into the land of shadows, should by rights share with the minister's persuasive powers the

credit of opening those hitherto obstinately-closed lips.

Scared, stunned, with shattered nerves and enfeebled bodily powers, Etelka followed her rescuer from the police-court, which figured to her bewildered fancy as a veritable bar of justice. A fortnight's serious illness followed, during which she was nursed with assiduity by "the Christian woman with many burthens." It was during that fortnight—when she believed herself to be lying at the gates of death—that she gave, in fragments, as her strength permitted, the story of her life.

It was a pitiful story enough. Her parentage was a curious one. Her father was a McIvor of Inverness-shire, who, when cruising in his yacht in the Mediterranean, fell in love with a beautiful peasant girl, whom he chanced to see dancing in the streets of Ajaccio, to the music of a

mandoline, played by her old grandfather. The girl was of gipsy extraction, and the old grandfather gained his livelihood partly by his mandoline-playing, partly by the practice of magic and occult arts, which had come down to him from his ancestry.

Hector McIvor must have been madly in love with this girl, for when she refused to leave her native mountains and return with him to Scotland, he spent nearly the whole of his patrimony in the purchase of an estate on the island, married her, and settled down there as a fruit-grower and sheep-breeder.

In spite, however, of her great beauty, the Corsican girl could not have made a pleasant companion. She owned to a gloomy temperament, was endowed with all the passions and prejudices of her race, and, among other superstitions, had a fixed belief in the ruling of the planets. It was

possibly a matter of congratulation to her husband that the whole of her kindred in the island was represented by her aged grandfather, who died shortly after the marriage.

But though Hector McIvor gave up his Highland home, he did not forget it. When Etelka was born, he sent for his own faithful old nurse and committed the little one to her care. No doubt, in due course, Etelka would have been taken over the seas to make the acquaintance of her Scotch kinsfolk if a bad form of fever visiting the island had not ended her father's life. Etelka was barely four years old when this happened. The father left no will, and his property fell unreservedly into the hands of his wife. Less competent hands could scarcely be imagined. It was not only that she lacked the most elementary knowledge concerning fruit-grow-

ing or sheep-breeding, but that her superstitions and prejudices interfered on all sides with those who had practical knowledge of these matters, and had filled positions of trust in her husband's time. Unlucky days were marked by her in the calendar, and on those days nothing must be done. Only when the moon was propitious must fruit be gathered; only when Jupiter was in the sixth house must sheep be bought or sold. Before she engaged even a labourer on the estate she must cast his nativity and read the lines on his hand.

The result can be imagined; both farm and orchard speedily became unproductive and unprofitable, and a yearly decreasing income was the result.

It was providential for the child that her Scotch nurse was a fairly-educated woman, otherwise she would have grown up in all-but heathen ignorance; the

mother never attempted to teach her aught save astrological lore and the beautiful dances in which she herself was so proficient; and this, she openly avowed, was merely by way of amusement in order to bring back in memory the happy days of her own girlhood.

“For where was the use to fight fate?” she would ask. “Save in recollection, happiness and prosperity could never more visit their home.” Life, so far as she was concerned, was at an end; the stars had said it, and the stars could not lie. As for Etelka, the malefic planets were in the ascendant when she was born, and there was nothing before her but a life of misery and an early and violent death.

“Look,” she would say, opening the child’s hand. “Her line of life breaks here, before she is twenty; and at her birth the moon was in opposition to Mars

in the eighth house. Any one who reads the stars knows what that means."

So the mother cut herself off from all companionship and sympathy with the ill-fated little one, and Etelka was left to the charge of the Scotch nurse, to be instructed by her in such lore as the old body had at command. Naturally, the child was taught by her to speak her father's as well as her mother's tongue. They were sadly at a loss for books, however. Etelka's mother took no interest in procuring any for her child; and the old nurse was intent upon saving every penny she could scrape together in order, some day, to take flight with the little girl to her father's people in Inverness. She kept alive the memory of the father in the child's heart by endless stories of his early days. A Scotch newspaper, occasionally received, was a mine of wealth and enjoyment to the

nurse and child. Etelka would have all sorts of strange stories read to her by the old body, who, with finger travelling down the columns, would try to bring before the child the geography of the places whose doings were there recorded.

Honestly enough the nurse tried to do her duty by the neglected child. She racked her brain for tales from English and Scottish history that would amuse and instruct the little one. The stories of the "Queen's Maries," "Fair Rosamond in her Bower," and of "Jane Shore," were as well-known to the child as if she had been English-born. The story of the last-named ill-fated beauty who "bewitched a King and died a vagrant," made a deep impression on her ; and the fact of the name being easy of recollection and pronunciation, no doubt led her later on, under changed conditions, to adopt it for her own, when a

sudden request for her name was made to her which she was unprepared to meet.

It was the nurse who, when the child began to develop a rare talent for landscape-painting, supplied her with colours and brushes, wherewith she taught herself to paint the wonderful skies and grand mountains of her Corsican home. It was she also who gave the little one her first faint notions of religion.

Calvinistic teaching from the nurse, partial initiation into the mysteries of astrology by the mother, wrought in the little Etelka's mind a curious habit of thought. "My mother," she said, as she related this portion of her history to the minister, "believed in fate, and called her belief astrology ; my nurse believed in fate, and called her belief by a long Scotch name—predestination."

Lying awake at nights and gazing up at

the stars, the little one used to wonder in quaint, childish fashion which was the star with the long Scotch name, which no doubt had ruled her father's destiny.

Debarred from playthings and all childish playfellows, it was no wonder that Etelka turned for companionship to the only young human being who ever came in her way, a boy—Giovanni by name—who kept her mother's goats on the mountains. Giovanni was about her own age, and speedily became devoted to the little girl. He taught her to climb the mountains, he made rods for her to fish with in the mountain streams, and showed her how to peel the young cork trees and make canoes of the bark, which together they floated out to sea.

In return, Etelka taught him all she knew of the lore of the planets, and tried to read his destiny for him in the heavens.

So things went on till Etelka was about twelve years of age, when her aged nurse died. On her death-bed she handed to Etelka the whole of her savings in English gold and Italian silver, bidding her keep the money safely, as sooner or later she might want it in order to make her way to her father's people, who, she assured the girl, would receive her with open arms. She also gave Etelka many and minute directions—which she made her take down in writing—as to the line of route she would have to follow in order to get to her Scotch home.

No doubt the faithful servant, taking into account the young girl's rapidly-developing beauty, saw dangers ahead of which Etelka had no conception.

After the nurse's death, things grew gloomier than ever. The house and the estate by this time had fallen into utter

ruin, and if it had not been for Giovanni and his mother, Elmina—who took the place of the Scotch nurse in the house—Etelka, at times, would have wanted food, and also would have been compelled to perform the commonest household duties.

Her mother she rarely saw. All absorbed in her occult arts, she was shut in one room nearly the whole day, and only wandered out at nights to lonely heights to study the positions of the planets. At rare intervals she would take Etelka with her on these midnight wanderings, show her her ruling planet, and talk to her of sextile, trine and square aspects, and the passage of the planets through the signs of the zodiac.

Etelka, thirsting for sympathy and companionship, prized these rare opportunities of intercourse with her mother beyond measure; she stood greatly in awe of her, and treasured her words as the inspired

utterances of a prophetess. The words "Fate wills it," so often on the mother's lips, were slowly but surely exercising a baleful influence on the young girl's daily habit of thought; and when one day the mother took her by the hand and pointing out one planet, told her that an evil star was rising for her, and a crisis in her life was at hand, Etelka trembled for what was coming.

Etelka carried her fears to Giovanni, who had by this time grown into a fine, handsome youth. Giovanni, for the first time in his life, only gave her half his attention. He had a great piece of news to tell. A *châlet* on the coast which had long been empty, had been rented by a Neapolitan gentleman and his mother; the mother was an invalid, and came for the sea-air; the son—the Count Palliardini—was a sportsman, and he came for sport. The Count

had met Giovanni as he was driving his goats along the mountain road, and had offered him good pay if he would act as his guide during his stay at Santa Maura.

Etelka, describing this Count Palliardini to the minister, admitted that he was handsome in person, courtly and polished in manner. He was cosmopolitan in his tastes, a first-rate linguist, speaking with ease three or four languages; he was also a wonderful improvisator, and skilled mandolinist; last, but not least, he was so formidable a duellist, that to cross swords with him meant certain death.

The first time that this man saw and spoke with Etelka, he fell desperately in love with her, and, young as she was, wished to make her his wife.

Etelka shrank from him with what seemed an unaccountable repugnance. She distrusted his courtly suavity, and sus-

pected that his obtrusively-displayed, effeminate tastes covered a coarse and brutal nature. Man of the world as he was, he laughed at her girlish dislike, and referred the matter to her mother. The mother as usual declined to take an active interest in her daughter's affairs. "What fate ruled would be," she said. "That year was a portentous one to Etelka; before it ended an evil planet would be at the square aspect of the place of the sun at her birth." And then she shut herself up once more in her lonely observatory at the top of the house and abandoned herself to her mystic studies.

It is possible that Etelka, in spite of her dislike to the Count, might have yielded to his importunities if Giovanni had not at this time begun to make his influence felt. He brought to her strange stories of Count Palliardini's life in the outer world of which they knew so little.

He had gathered from talk which he had overheard between the Count and his mother, that neither the Countess's ill-health, nor the Count's love of sport, had been their real reason for coming to Corsica; but that the Count was "under a cloud" for a duel which he had fought in Naples under suspicious circumstances, his adversary being his own cousin, by whose death from his sword-thrust he had greatly benefited.

People in Naples had raised a hue-and-cry over the business, saying that the Count had purposely picked a quarrel with his young cousin; and, hence, the Count and his mother had found it expedient to retire for a time from Neapolitan society before attempting to take possession of the dead man's inheritance.

Giovanni further went on to say that the Count in his own home drank freely

of wine, was hard and tyrannical to his servants, cruel to dumb animals, and boasted freely of the women's hearts he had broken, and the men whom he had killed in duels.

Etelka, with her mother's prophecy of approaching evil ringing still in her ears, was seized with a sudden terror lest that prophecy might have its fulfilment in her marriage with this man whom she hated and feared. She resolved to do her best to flee from her evil destiny, and, together with Giovanni, laid a plan for taking flight from Santa Maura to her father's people in Scotland.

They took Giovanni's mother into their confidence; and she, no doubt stimulated by ambitious views for her son, helped forward their plans. The three pored over the old nurse's directions which Etelka had taken down in writing, and again and again they counted up the legacy of English

gold and Corsican silver which Etelka had kept in a safe hiding-place. They decided that Giovanni should accompany Etelka to Ajaccio (whence she would take boat for Marseilles), and remain there until Etelka sent money for him to follow her, as their store of gold was inadequate for the travelling expenses of two persons. The early twilight was fixed for the time of their departure, when Etelka's mother would be shut up in her observatory, and Giovanni's master would be enjoying his evening siesta.

Their councils were held, and arrangements were made with the greatest care and secrecy they imagined. Some incautious act, however, must have betrayed them.

On the day they had fixed, and at the twilight hour, Etelka crept out of her home and made her way over the mountains to

the edge of the forest, where she and Giovanni had arranged to meet. She kept her eyes downcast; she would not look up to the skies, for there she knew shone out the bright planet she had learned to hate.

But it was not Giovanni who stepped from out the shadows of the big plane tree and took her by the hand, but Count Palliardini himself.

“Might he have the pleasure of being her escort? Was she expecting to meet the boy Giovanni? Ah, yes, he had met with an accident that day. Well, there were enough and to spare of such *canaille* as he, and one less would be so much to the good.”

These were the words with which he greeted her.

Giovanni's accident, when it came to be told, proved to be “that last dread acci-

dent which men call death." The Count's statement was that he and Giovanni had gone fishing in the early morning in one of the mountain streams; he had gone higher up the stream than the lad, and when he came back had found him lying face downwards in the river-bed with his rod floating down-stream. He conjectured that the lad had dropped his rod into the water, and trying to recover it, had fallen in, and been carried out of his depth. The Count had called to some shepherds for help, but when between them they had got the boy out of the stream, life was extinct.

Etelka went back to her home dazed and stunned; she and Elmina suspected foul play on the part of the Count, but there was no evidence to support their suspicions.

Before Etelka had time to rally from the shock of this calamity, another followed

on its heels. Her mother, in attempting to cure herself of ague, from which she suffered through exposure to damp and night air, took an over-dose of some vegetable poison that she was in the habit of employing as a medicine, and in a few hours was dead.

Her last words, as she lay with dying eyes fixed on Etelka's face, were: "Poison for me; poison, or fire, or flood for you—the stars have spoken."

After the mother's death the Count pressed his suit more hotly than ever. Then it was that Etelka, driven to desperation, looked up at the evil glittering planet high in the heavens and defied it. She resolved to fight her destiny. She had tried to flee from it and had failed, now she would fight it.

But of the means by which she endeavoured to do this the minister knew

nothing for certain, although, possibly, his suspicions went near to hitting the mark.

“At this point in her story,” he said, “the girl had turned her face to the wall, and her lips had once more been obstinately sealed.” Of her attempt upon Count Palliardini’s life, her hurried flight to England, and her stay at Upton, she had told him nothing.

From this point, however, Madge found it easy enough, in imagination, to take up and finish the pitiful story. She could picture Etelka, in the gloom of her desolate home, handling her mother’s poison bottles, while the lamentations of Elmina over her only son rang in her ears, together with the woman’s cries for vengeance on his murderer.

She could picture the girl laying her plans, step by step, up to and after her terrible attempt at crime ; her hurried flight

to Marseilles ; her brief stay there to provide herself with less remarkable clothing than that her island village could supply ; her arrival, half-dazed and bewildered, in England ; her attempt to reach her father's home in Inverness ; and her recognition of the hand of fate in the railway accident, and the arrival of Lance and Sir Peter on the scene of disaster.

After this, there had come, no doubt, a partial awakening of conscience, a sense of remorse intensified by the thought of a relentless pursuing Nemesis.

With the light of her luckless history thrown upon it, it became easy to understand her attempts upon her own life ; her terror of what was hanging over her head as each attempt failed ; and, finally, her revulsion to joy and gratitude, and her tremulous snatchings at better things when the newspaper brought the tidings that she

was not the murderess she had supposed herself to be, and the proffer of Lance's love made her judgment subordinate to the voice of her heart, which suggested that possibly her mother had misread her future, and that after all happier days were in store for her.

CHAPTER VII.

SIR PETER's handkerchief had gone very often to his eyes during this recital. "If we had only known, eh, Madge?" he said again and again, picturing to himself the benefits he would have showered upon the friendless girl had he known one quarter of her friendlessness.

His heart was divided in two. It seemed to him that so much misery should by rights be crowned by the happy story-book ending: "And she lived for ever afterwards happy and comfortable."

Under the influence of this thought he was disposed to bid Lance God-speed in his wooing. Yet there was another side to

the question; there was Madge looking every whit as white and forlorn as ever that friendless young girl had looked. Really, it was hard to say which way his sympathies should be allowed to incline.

But something else beside sympathy must surely be required of him. They had been sitting still a long time, it would be a positive relief to set the wheels of life going in one direction or another. "Did you ascertain from Miss McIvor the name of her father's family place in Inverness—McIvor is a very general name in the Highlands?" he presently asked with a passing vision of a delightful little trip to the Highland capital to make the acquaintance of the young lady's kindred.

"Miss McIvor refused to give me any information on the matter," replied the minister. "'It was not to be,' she said,

in reply to my inquiries. From this I concluded that she imagined that fate had spoken against her joining her father's people, and she had given up all idea of doing so. I confess I did not urge her on the matter. I could not see her in her right place among the followers of John Calvin, getting the seal set, as it were, to her fatalism. It also occurred to me that supposing Count Palliardini saw fit to pursue the poor girl to England, he would naturally, in the first instance, trace out these relatives of hers."

Sir Peter suddenly seemed to see a way to a benevolent interference in Miss McIvor's affairs.

"It occurs to me," he said, taking a little trot round the room and coming to a standstill at the minister's side, "that if any one had taken the trouble to put the matter in the right light to Count Palliardini—I

mean had represented to him the impropriety of persecuting a young girl with his addresses, he might have been induced to offer her friendship instead. Now I should amazingly like to have a good talk with the man; I'm sure I should do something with him."

And now the old gentleman's brain was filled with the vision of a pleasant little trip to Corsica, and a delightful *tête-à-tête* with the Neapolitan Count.

"My dear sir! my dear good sir!" ejaculated the minister.

"Where is Miss McIvor now—at Liverpool?" interrupted Madge.

The minister resumed his story. "I quickly found out that she was out of place in the busy home in which I had placed her; but where would she be in her right place? I asked myself again and again. I tried to picture her in a modern fashion-

able drawing-room, on the boards of a theatre, in a convent even. No; I could see her nowhere in her right place. Then one day I had a letter from my sister Jenny——”

“Ah, Jenny! Who was she; what was her occupation in life?” interrupted Sir Peter; to his fancy the minister was not telling his story half fast enough.

“I was about to say. I left Jenny a child when I went off to the colonies, I returned to find her—well—say mature. Jenny is a capital housewife, stout, handsome, healthy, and active. And she had been condemned, by circumstances, for years to lead the life of a student; to be eyes, in fact, to a blind astronomer; to read science to him, and act as his amanuensis by day, and at nights to gaze through his telescope at the stars.”

“Capital!” cried Sir Peter. “And you

made sister Jenny and Miss McIvor change places!"

"I did so. I could see Miss McIvor—mentally that is—in her right place in a lonely observatory, with face upturned to a night sky!"

Madge started. There came back to her the vision of a white face upturned to the stars with a prayer for mercy on its lips.

The minister went on. "I knew, too, that her astronomical knowledge and habit of close observance of the heavens would be most useful in an observatory. Poor Jenny used to get such severe scoldings at times for inaccuracy and carelessness. 'Deliver me from this if you possibly can,' she had written to me on my arrival. 'I'm losing my hand for short crust, and as for stockings, I couldn't turn a heel now to save my life!' So I asked Miss McIvor if she would allow herself to be guided by me

in this emergency. 'It is written,' was all her reply. On her lips it meant 'Kismet! I bow to that.'"

Here Sir Peter's handkerchief went to his eyes again. "Ah, that Count," he murmured. "I would like to get hold of him for five minutes!"

Mr. Parker continued his story. "I knew something of this astronomer, or I would not have suggested such a thing. He is of Norwegian descent, Harold Svenson by name, a man between seventy and eighty years of age, whose eyesight failed him ten years ago. He knows that his life is drawing to a close, and he is bent on verifying and classifying his observations of the past fifty years of his life. He is very poor; has spent nearly all his fortune in buying the finest astronomical instruments that can be had, and consequently he cannot afford to engage a scientific

assistant in his work. His wife, a woman of about sixty years of age, does his house-keeping for him ; and, because Jenny wanted next to no salary, he engaged her to act as his amanuensis, and, under his direction, to survey the heavens. He is a good man ; all who come in contact with him are the better for it."

"Ah ! poor, learned, good !" summed up Sir Peter. "We must get him here, Madge ? Bring him back with Miss McIvor, build him an observatory on one of the hills, and set him up in instruments. What's the name of the place where he's to be found ?" .

"It's not far off. There is a bleak rock on the Cumberland coast, about five-and-twenty miles from here—at high tide it is cut off from the land ; on it stands a round tower, that, some years ago, was used as a lighthouse. Svenson has been allowed to

locate himself in it for a small yearly rental, and the roof-room, which formerly held the light, he has adapted to the exigencies of his telescope."

"Rather circumscribed for space though," ejaculated Sir Peter, thinking of the difficulty of getting "a little exercise" under such conditions. "It strikes me Miss McIvor will be uncommonly glad to get a little more breathing room. We must get her back as soon as possible, eh, Madge?"

"If you'll take my advice, Sir Peter," said the minister, preventing Madge's reply, "you'll leave her where she is as long as possible. To be under the same roof with a man like Svenson is an education to a person of Miss McIvor's temperament. He is a man of a high order of intellect, and though untrammelled by religious conventionalities, religion is the life and soul of his being. I wrote to him fully of Miss

McIvor's sad career, and begged him to do his utmost to bring her to a happier frame of mind. 'Make her, if possible, see,' I wrote, 'that her astrological notions, to be worth anything at all, must be pushed to their widest limits, and then they will be found to contain truths bigger than any she wots of.'"

"To their widest limits!" echoed Sir Peter, enthusiastically, more than ever convinced that the Rev. Joshua Parker was a man after his own heart. "I heartily endorse, I entirely concur in all you say, my dear sir! But—but," here he stammered and hesitated somewhat, "it's a little puzzling—a little bewildering. Do you mind explaining slightly what you do mean?"

"Not in the least; my meaning is very simple. I look upon astrology as a praiseworthy endeavour, by thinkers of a certain order, to account for the mystery of our

three-fold nature, and to embody, classify, and time the apparently arbitrary and resistless influences which compel men to certain courses of action. Now, if these thinkers had thought a little harder, they would have found that this three-fold nature exists, not only in humanity, but in all creation ; and that these apparently arbitrary and resistless influences prevail, not alone in this world, but throughout the universe, and antedate the planets which mark time for us by as much as eternity antedates time. In other words, they would have found that we are in harmony with the planets only because the planets, like us, are in harmony with the grand and eternal laws which govern the universe, and that these planets can no more give a law to man, woman, or child on the earth than the dial-plate of a clock can give a law to the mechanism which moves its hands."

Sir Peter passed his hand over his forehead. "Eh! it's a little puzzling. Did Svenson understand all that, do you think?"

"Undoubtedly; his reply to me showed he did. 'My telescope will make her see this better than my words could,' he wrote. 'Before she leaves my roof I guarantee she will see, that to make the stars spell out the decrees of fate when she might read in them the laws which govern fate, is like persisting in reading nursery rhymes when one might revel in the enjoyment and education of Homer, Milton, or Shakespeare.'"

Madge, who had sat a silent listener throughout this conversation, was impatient to bring back the talk to Miss McIvor's more immediate doings. She had a question to ask, which held for her a painful interest.

"When did Miss McIvor go to this observatory?" she said in a low, eager tone.

"About ten days since we left Liverpool — 'we' means Jenny, Miss McIvor, and I," answered the minister; "I had written to Jenny to arrange matters with Mr. Svenson and to come to Liverpool in case I might not be able to escort Miss McIvor on her journey North. We reached Carstairs; there I received a telegram recalling me to Liverpool on matters connected with my ministerial duties, so I commissioned Jenny to continue the journey alone. She had an anxious time with Miss McIvor after I left them. The young lady refused to continue her journey, and took to gazing at the stars again. There was another crisis in her life at hand, she said, as also a crisis in some other person's. She kept her room all day long, and wandered out at nights. Jenny was

scarcely so vigilant as she ought to have been, and Miss McIvor disappeared one afternoon, and did not return till early the following day."

"Did she give any account of her doings during her absence?" queried Sir Peter.

"She came back saying that she had taken train to a place that was memorable to her, and had seen what she had expected to see—'the stars had not lied to her.' Those were her words."

Madge drew a long breath. She felt that the gray, shadowy form in the churchyard was accounted for now.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL Madge's plans seemed turned upside down ; her preparations for her journey to Spain came to a halt. The startling revelations of a brief twenty-four hours had seemed to put the Spanish convent into the far distance. Now that what had appeared to her as a sin, almost beyond the hope of Heaven's pardon, no longer brought a tragedy in its train, all thought of penance for it vanished. Her mind began to recover its balance, and, unconsciously to herself, other duties in life began to assert their claims. At the present moment, however, her future was a blank

o her. Till Lance's fate was decided, she could give no thought to her own.

Although she no longer harboured enmity against the woman who had supplanted her in Lance's love, she had no wish ever again to stand face to face with her. Also, from the bottom of her heart, she prayed that she might never again in this life meet the look of Lance's wrathful eyes. All she desired now was to know that the happiness of this man, for whom she had risked so much, was assured to him. Gervase Critchett's death had given back to him wealth and worldly prosperity. Her one desire was that love and happiness might crown both for him.

She waited impatiently for telegram from him acknowledging hers. When, however, one day had ended and another had begun, and there had not come back the swift "Thank Heaven" on which she counted

she grew vaguely uneasy, and consulted Sir Peter on the matter.

His face, as he listened, implied a secret to be kept; and his lips disclosed that secret on the spot. He even fetched Lance's letter, and, skimming it with his eye, read portions aloud. He seemed to feel considerably relieved when he had got rid of his secret, and she knew as much about Lance's movements as he did. He hazarded the conjecture that Lance's investigations might have taken him out of Liverpool—to London, perhaps; but suggested that work might be found for the telegraph wires in the shape of a kindly message to Miss Melvor.

Madge demurred vigorously to this.

By a painful effort of self-abnegation she put herself for one moment in Miss Melvor's place, and swiftly decided that overtures for a renewal of friendly intercourse must,

in the first instance, come from Lance. If Miss McIvor were inclined to accept him as a future husband, she might be willing, for his sake, to pardon the slights put upon her by his people. If such a far-away possibility as her rejection of Lance's suit came to be realised, then the wider the gulf between her and Upton the better.

Before that day ended, Sir Peter's conjecture as to the reason of Lance's silence was confirmed.

A stranger arrived at the Castle stating that his business was urgent, and that he wished without delay to see both Mrs. Cohen and Sir Peter. He was a detective from Liverpool; for Sir Peter he had a question; for Mrs. Cohen an important communication. The question to Sir Peter was: What was the latest news received of or from his late secretary, Mr. Stubbs? The communication to Mrs. Cohen conveyed the intelligence

that cheques for various large sums, bearing her signature, had lately been paid into the county bank at Liverpool by persons who had had dealings with Mr. Stubbs, and it was important to know if these signatures were forgeries.

The detective went on to say that suspicion in the first instance had been aroused against Mr. Stubbs by inquiries made by Mr. Clive of local magistrates, and, subsequently, of the police authorities. It had so chanced, also, that, on the very day on which Mr. Clive's inquiries were made of the police authorities, a man, who gave himself out to be a clerk in a private inquiry office at Carstairs, in which Mr. Stubbs had at one time been employed, made an important communication to the chief inspector. It was to the effect that he had reason to believe that Stubbs had stolen Mrs. Cohen's cheque-book, and that

certain cheques which he had been dealing out, rather freely of late, had forged signatures attached to them.

The detective furthermore added that there was little room for doubting that the informer had at one time been an accomplice of Mr. Stubbs's in certain shady transactions which had recently come to light, and it was possible that Stubbs's greed in keeping his spoils to himself in his latest peccadillo had severed the bond between the two rogues.

Madge had also but little doubt on the matter, when she recollected Mr. Stubbs's ready talk of a friend at Carstairs, who had acted as his agent from time to time.

A search through the davenport, in which Mrs. Cohen had been wont to keep her cheque-book, confirmed the surmise as to its abstraction.

Sir Peter's grief and bewilderment at

these revelations took in turns a comic and a tragic form. He vowed—walking up and down the room very fast—that he would have no more *protégés* if he lived to the age of Methuselah ; that he would withdraw his name from every charity-list on which it figured, except that of the asylum for lunatics and idiots, who, after all, were the only reliably honest people in the world. Finally, he “got upon rockers” in front of the detective, and, raising his eyebrows very high, and tip-toeing very fast, asked a series of surprising questions : “Why should he not withdraw his charity subscriptions if he felt so disposed ? Was not his money his own, his name and his time also at his own disposal ? Was he to stand still, and allow himself to be cheated by every rogue who came along ? ”

The worthy detective, never before having had the pleasure of meeting Sir

Peter, was a little inclined to doubt the old gentleman's sanity. His doubts grew upon him when, the next moment, Sir Peter suddenly sank into a chair, supplemented his series of questions with a series of apologies—"He wasn't himself at all; his head was going round with the startling news he had received during the past twenty-four hours"—and then as suddenly started up again, vowing that he had had no exercise that morning; and there and then set off for a promenade in a gale that fell little short of a hurricane.

Madge, left alone with the detective, put the question which she had with difficulty kept back :

"Did he know where Mr. Clive was at the present moment?"

The detective replied that when Mr. Clive had called at the police-office on the previous day, he was on his way to London

to institute an investigation into the disappearance of a young lady who, Mr. Stubbs had stated, had committed suicide at Liverpool, but who it was possible might not have been near Liverpool at all. Mr. Clive, however, had said that he would be back at Liverpool the next day in order to follow up a certain clue which he had in hand there. He had given in writing a description of this young lady to the chief inspector of police, who had forthwith set inquiries on foot.

Then the detective drifted back to Mr. Stubbs and his roguery. There was every reason to believe that the man under another name had taken passage to America with his stolen property ; the cable, however, had been set going, and there was little doubt but that as soon as he landed he would be arrested and sent back again.

But Madge had too many deeper interests at heart at the moment to be much concerned by Mr. Stubbs's chances of detection or escape.

"Did Mr. Clive give any address in London to which a telegram could be sent?" she asked.

"He did not, madam," replied the man, astonished at the lady's want of interest in her banking account. "He won't dare attempt to pass another cheque now—he'll guess that by this time the affair has got wind—Stubbs, I mean," he added, getting back to the subject which had the greatest professional attraction for him.

Sir Peter came back, scarlet and breathless from his battle with the elements, but in a decidedly more cheerful frame of mind. It was to be a busy day for him. He had no sooner got back to the house than Mr. Parker presented himself, great-coated and with

bag in hand, ready to depart. His time was not his own, he said. He was but a paid servant after all, and was bound to go about his business, not his pleasure, without further delay.

Sir Peter was vastly disappointed. He had conceived a strong liking for the worthy minister, whose theories on matters of benevolence were, from one point of view, strangely in accordance with his own.

“If I had only known you earlier in life. I could have accomplished so much more in my sixty years,” he sighed.

He forgot his outburst of a moment ago against philanthropy in all its branches, and pictured regretfully what a wonderful partnership in benevolence might have been set up if his active mind and liberal purse had seconded the minister’s keen eye for matter in the wrong place.

“We’ll build you a chapel in the valley,

and find you lots to do if you'll pitch your tent here," he said, utterly oblivious of the fact that he had always announced himself to be "a staunch supporter of Church and State, sir."

The minister shook his head.

"I must go where I'm sent. I can't see myself here among your educated respectful farmers and peasants ; but I can see myself where I'm ordered to go—among the rough-and-ready miners in the Durham coal pits."

Sir Peter's hopes revived when he found that the minister's destination was not far from Redesdale. He knew that he must of necessity see a good deal of Redesdale now that Madge's interest in her property there had grown so languid, and hence there was a chance that he and the worthy minister might often meet.

A large amount of hand-shaking and a very hearty farewell followed.

The minister's last words were an entreaty that news of Miss McIvor might be sent to him so soon as there should be any to send, for he would never cease to take the deepest interest in her, although he felt himself to be supplanted in his guardianship of the young lady by these influential friends of hers.

The arrival of a second visitor, before the wheels which conveyed the minister on his road had died in the distance, thoroughly restored Sir Peter's equanimity.

"Dear me," he said to the servant who announced the fact to him, "first one thing, then another. Wanted everywhere; can't get a minute to myself! What name did you say? Palli-ar-di-ni! Count Palliardini! Ah! Show the gentleman in at once, and see that we're not disturbed."

It seemed to the old gentleman that this unlooked-for event must have been

arranged by special intervention of Providence, in order to give him scope for his benevolent intentions.

"He has come to make inquiries after Miss McIvor, of course," he said to himself. "Now I shall have the opportunity of reasoning with him and setting matters before him in a right light. Shouldn't wonder if I make a different man of him altogether before I've done with him."

His sense of importance grew upon him. He wheeled a big chair up to a big table, and pictured himself seated there lecturing the Count.

"But I must be discreet—very," he said to himself as he heard the Count's steps approaching. "What am I to say when he asks where the young lady is? Well, I'm not obliged to tell him, am I? I flatter myself I can keep a secret if I set my mind to it."

CHAPTER IX.

“Ах, a fine, handsome young fellow! doesn't look the villain we've given him credit for—perhaps things have been a trifle exaggerated. But I must be discreet—very!” said Sir Peter to himself, as Count Palliardini crossed the room, and gave him for greeting the most courtly of bows.

The Count was tall, and slight in figure. His carriage was good, his dress was faultless. He had driven nine miles across country in a blustering gale, yet not a hair of his head seemed blown astray. The solution of this mystery lay in the fact that on arriving at the Castle, he had stopped for a good five minutes in front of

a mirror in the hall to arrange his hair with a pocket-comb.

“Of the lazy, effeminate, Italian type,” was Sir Peter’s second thought as he noted the young man’s slow and languid movements.

And “his hand is the hand for the guitar, not the sword; depend upon it his prowess has been exaggerated,” was his third and last thought as he looked at the slender, white hand which, for a moment, touched his in response to his essentially English acknowledgment of the courtly bow.

Count Palliardini summed up Sir Peter in a very few words.

“A very small picture with a very large margin,” he said to himself, as he took a leisurely survey of the small, plump, old gentleman seated in the lofty room, which could with ease have accommodated the congregation of a village church.

"Now, how shall I begin? I've a good deal to say," Sir Peter thought. Then a sudden fear seized him: "What if he doesn't understand English! The idea never struck me before."

The Count speedily set his mind at rest by saying in excellent English that he must beg Sir Peter to accept his apologies for his sudden and unceremonious arrival. He could only plead the extreme urgency of his business as his excuse.

Save for the roll of his R's, and the distinctness with which he spoke his final syllables, one might have set down English as his mother-tongue.

"No excuse is necessary, my dear sir," said Sir Peter, immensely relieved at the Count's linguistic capabilities. "Your name is not unknown to me. Only yesterday I was expressing a wish to make your acquaintance."

The Count for a moment let his large, black eyes rest on Sir Peter's face. "Now, what is behind all this?" those eyes seemed to say.

He would have been greatly surprised if he had been told that nothing beyond a benevolent wish to deliver a homily on the duty of kindness and unselfishness lay behind the old gentleman's friendly speeches.

He acknowledged the friendliness with another courtly bow. Then he went on to explain the object of his visit, mentioning Miss McIvor by name, and speaking of her dead mother as a valued friend of his own.

"I have had some little difficulty in tracing the young lady to your house," he added. "If it had not been for her striking personal appearance, I do not suppose I should have succeeded in doing so through the many breaks in her journey."

“Ah, what made you fancy she had come to England?” queried Sir Peter, desirous to get a little time for himself in which to arrange the opening sentences of his lecture.

“I knew that Miss McIvor had relatives in Scotland, and when she suddenly disappeared from her home I naturally concluded that she had gone on a visit to them. I had some little difficulty in discovering to which of the McIvors her father had belonged—there are so many of that name in Scotland. When, however, I succeeded in finding his people, and heard that she had not been near them, I set the police in Edinburgh and in London to work. It is thanks to their efforts that I am here.”

Sir Peter was perplexed. He knew well enough what the Count's next question would be. He wished he had had time to consult Madge on the matter before rushing into so momentous an interview.

"Miss McIvor left us some little time back," he said, presently. "There, that tells him nothing," he added to himself.

"Yes, I know," answered the Count. "It was the stir which her sudden departure from your house caused in the neighbourhood which enabled the police to trace her to Upton. But you have had news of her since she left?"

"Ah, yes—very satisfactory news, I'm glad to say."

"There, that tells him nothing," once more he added to himself.

The Count looked at the old gentleman steadily. "I shall be much obliged if you will tell me where she is at the present moment, and the quickest way of getting to the place," he said, after a moment's pause.

Sir Peter pushed back his chair, rose from the table, and commenced a quick march round the room. Now or never for his homily, he thought; but really his ideas

wanted a little arranging. "Let me see," he said to himself. "First, there's this gentleman to be reconciled to Miss McIvor. No, by-the-bye, he's in love with her already; it's the other way! Miss McIvor is to be reconciled to the Count. Ah, but we don't want her to fall in love with him; there's Lance to be thought of. Well, I must put in a good word for Lance somehow—I can't have these two young men quarrelling over the girl—and I must give this young man a little bit of good advice. What a blessing it is he speaks and understands English! Yes, I've a good deal to say, and, before anything else, I must be discreet—very!"

The Count kept his seat, his eyes following Sir Peter in his quick march.

"Is he a lunatic," he thought, "or does he suffer from rheumatism? He seems a little jerky about the joints."

Sir Peter came to a stand-still in front of the Count's chair. He laid his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder.

"My young friend, look at me. I'm an old man—old enough to be your father," he said.

The Count turned and looked at him. "No, it is not rheumatism; flighty—but harmless—that's what he is!" he thought.

He bowed acquiescence in Sir Peter's remark.

Sir Peter went on briskly :

"I'm sure you'll agree with me that young men are sometimes the better for a little fatherly advice."

"A little fatherly advice!" repeated the Count, slowly, with just the faintest curl of his upper lip.

"Exactly. A little fatherly advice. Now, I have an adopted son of my own. He is about your own age; a fine young fellow

like you; and what I say to you this morning, I am going to say to him. 'Lance,' I shall say to him, 'the only way to get happily through life is to give and take.'"

"Ah, and this Signor Lance, this 'fine young fellow,' will listen to you, and do as you tell him—'Give and take'?"

Sir Peter shirked the question.

"I've a great deal to say," he began.

The Count pulled out his watch.

"Pardon me," he said, "if I say that my business is urgent, and I have a train to save. I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will tell me where Miss McIvor is at the present moment, and allow me as quickly as possible to continue my journey."

Sir Peter was disconcerted.

"What I have to say is of great importance. It concerns you, it concerns

Miss McIvor, and it concerns my adopted son, Lance."

There came a sudden change of expression to the Count's face.

"How can what concerns Miss McIvor and me concern also this Signor Lance?" he asked.

He was prepared to listen now, not a doubt, to what Sir Peter had to say.

Sir Peter shirked this question also. He made an apparently irrelevant remark.

"If we would be happy we must make others happy."

"Must we?"

"Now—pardon my saying so—it occurs to me that it is in your power to make two people very happy. Those two people are Miss McIvor and my boy Lance."

All the languor, in a moment, had gone out of those large Southern eyes upturned to Sir Peter's face.

“Miss McIvor’s happiness is of importance to me. Your boy, Lance, I do not know.”

“I shall be delighted to introduce you ; we’re expecting him back by every train. I ought to have told you that when Miss McIvor left us so suddenly, he went in search of her. Then, when he heard—ah ! well, it’s a long story. At any rate, he returned, and then set off again, intending to go to Corsica.”

“Ah, I would have welcomed him, this Signor Lance, if I had been there,” murmured the Count.

“I’m sure you would,” said Sir Peter, heartily. “Now, where was I ?—I’ve lost myself, somehow. I was going to say—ah, what was it ?”

The old gentleman looked “very much mixed,” and once more set off on a trot to the farther end of the room. A question

from the Count, asked in a voice which Sir Peter had not heard before, brought him back.

"Tell me," he said, "this Signor Lance, did he take a very great interest in Miss McIvor?"

"A very great interest is no name for it, my dear sir; he fell desperately in love with her," answered the guileless Sir Peter; "and I'm bound to say that at first I was a little disconcerted at it—I had other views for him——"

"You had other views for him?"

"Yes—all this is in strict confidence, my dear sir—a marriage was as good as arranged between him and a lady—my ward, Mrs. Cohen—— But bless me, I'm running on; this can't interest you in the slightest degree."

"I am deeply interested," said the Count, in the same voice as before. "The lady whom you wished the Signor Lance to

marry, did she take a deep interest in Miss McIvor ?”

“She did not at first ; in fact, I’m sorry to say she took a most unaccountable dislike to the young lady ; but afterwards, in a most noble and unselfish way, she gave up all thought of her own happiness——”

He broke off abruptly.

“Ah, that’s it,” he cried, delightedly, “that brings me back to what I was going to say——”

“Such sad news from the coast,” said Madge, coming into the room at that moment, all unconscious of Sir Peter’s visitor. “A barque ran ashore last night, about three miles below St. Cuthbert’s church—— Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought you were alone.”

“A barque ashore !” cried Sir Peter, excitedly. Then he bethought him of the courtesies of life. “Madge, may I intro-

duce to you the Count Palliardini?" He turned to the Count. "This is my ward, Mrs. Cohen."

Madge almost started in her amazement. She knew in a flash of thought that here was a crisis to be faced. She looked at the Count's slender white hand, and thought of the stain of blood on it; she looked at his dark, handsome face, and said to herself: "An Iago with the face of an Adonis."

And the Count, as he bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction, took a slow, steady survey of Madge, and said to himself:

"She has no beauty; it is her lot to love better than she is loved. She is white and worn to a shadow; she has suffered. The little Marietta who broke her heart for me had much such a look in her eyes when I said to her: 'My child, we must part.'"

CHAPTER X.

THE news of the stranded barque set Sir Peter ringing the bell and ordering his dog-cart to be brought round immediately. He was equipped and out of the house in a little over five minutes. During that five minutes, however, he managed to get through a good deal.

Madge wandered after him into the hall, trying to whisper a question as to what information he had or had not imparted to Count Palliardini, for it was of first importance to her to know on what footing affairs stood now. But no! before she had time to get her question to her lips, Sir Peter was back again in the library,

going through a series of polite apologies and explanations to the Count.

“So sorry to have to run away like this ; but I’m sure you’ll understand my anxiety to be at the scene of disaster. Now, may I have the pleasure of putting you up for the night?”

The Count rose from his chair. “I would rather you should have the pleasure of dismissing me,” he said. “I am anxious to continue my journey, and if you will be good enough to tell me where Miss McIvor is to be found, and how to get to the place, I will start at once.”

Sir Peter waved his hand towards Madge, who stood in the hall just outside the library door.

“Mrs. Cohen will answer all your questions, I am sure, with a great deal of pleasure.”

Then he flitted into the hall again.

"Madge, my dear," he whispered, "I leave the matter in your hands; you will know exactly what to do for the best."

"What have you told him?" asked Madge, anxiously.

"Nothing, my dear, absolutely nothing; I have used the utmost discretion."

Then he was back again in the library, ringing the bell to countermand some order already transmitted to the stables.

"Now, you won't hurry away; you'll have some refreshment before you go? It seems so uncourteous for me to start off in this fashion; but I'm sure you'll understand. I've a big scheme in my head——"

This was said to the Count.

"Ah, yes!"—this to the servant—"have Leah put to, she gets along faster in the wind than Havelock——"

Then again to the Count:

"A big scheme, yes—I shall telegraph

to the Mayor of Carstairs and some of the clergy to meet me this afternoon, so that we can at once form a Vigilance Committee to watch this part of the coast while the gale lasts. Now I'm off!"

Naturally, very little of this information was of the slightest interest to the Count. He slightly smiled.

"Mrs. Cohen, you say, will answer my questions?" he asked.

But Sir Peter was now in the hall, talking to Mrs. Cohen. "Madge, my dear," he was saying, "you have before you a grand opportunity! By the exercise of a little tact and discretion, you may succeed in effecting a vast amount of good. You must speak plainly to the Count—The cart's at the door!"—this to a servant who approached at that moment. "Ah, by the way, I must get some more telegraph-forms," and back into the library he went,

to provide himself with these from one of the writing-tables.

The Count had another "passing word" from him.

It was :

"I'm delighted to have had this opportunity of speaking to you in my boy Lance's interests—as I said before, 'give and take' is a golden rule."

Madge started aghast. Had he absolutely flourished in the face of this man the fact that Lance wished to figure as his rival ?

"Madge, my dear," said the old gentleman, hurrying towards the door, and stuffing telegraph-forms into his pocket as he went along, "don't forget there lies before you the grand opportunity of making two people very happy ; that is, of course, if you can manage to make the Count see matters in the right light. I've paved the way for you. Between ourselves, I don't

think he's half such a bad fellow as has been made out ; but be discreet above everything else — remember I've told him nothing. Now I'm off ! ”

Madge knew by experience that he wasn't yet !

He got his foot on the step of his dog-cart, then ran up the hall steps in a great hurry to give an order that blankets were to be sent after him in bundles, all that could be got together, as quickly as possible —and brandy—and rum—also as quickly as possible.

Then Madge had another word whispered into her ear : “ Not half such a bad fellow ; but be discreet, my dear. Now I'm off ! ”

And this time he really was “ off.” With his foot once more on the step of the dog-cart, he waved his hand to her ; the wind carried his voice away, but she could see

that his lips formed to the words: "Be discreet!"

The old gentleman's anxiety to escape from what threatened to be an embarrassing situation was easy enough to read, and at any other time Madge would have laughed at it. The crisis, however, which this anxiety of his compelled her to face without a moment's preparation, was no laughing matter.

She strove to collect her thoughts. One thing only seemed clear to her—that there was no use in attempting to shirk an interview with Count Palliardini; whatever danger threatened must be met and faced, alike in Lance's interests and in Miss McIvor's.

Of course the Count's one and only object in coming to the house was to discover Miss McIvor's hiding-place. Supposing that she refused to give him any information con-

cerning it, two dangers seemed to threaten ; one that he would stimulate the energies of the police on the matter by pressing the criminal charge against the girl ; the other that he would seek an interview with Lance, or dog and follow his footsteps, and in this way obtain the information which he sought.

Now how was she to face two such momentous difficulties as these ?

She might have studied this question for days and not have arrived at any satisfactory conclusion on the matter. To arrive at any conclusion, satisfactory or otherwise, in a mere flash of thought was an impossibility. She could only hope that as she met or parried the inevitable questions, her good angel might whisper a timely suggestion in her ear.

She went back to the library to find the Count standing in the window recess,

looking after Sir Peter's vanishing dog-cart.

"Is he always like this?" he queried, a little contemptuously Madge thought.

To gain time for herself, she began a series of apologies for Sir Peter's sudden departure.

"It is an amazing benevolence," he answered, the contemptuousness of his manner becoming even more pronounced. "A few fishermen, more or less! A few more or less of the *canaille* to annoy and get in one's way! What does it matter?"

The words unpleasantly recalled the story of the boy Giovanni's death.

He gave her no time, however, to express her indignation, but went straight to the object of his visit.

"Sir Peter has referred me to you, madame, for an answer to my inquiries respecting Miss McIvor."

Madge seated herself in the window recess, thereby turning her back to the light. He took a chair facing her, the full light falling upon his handsome, well-cut features, and bold, black eyes.

He went on :

“Miss McIvor, I believe, was staying some little time in this house. Will you be good enough to tell me where she is at the present moment?”

Madge felt that she must speak.

“I scarcely think I am justified in doing so,” she answered, slowly.

The Count smiled, and looked handsomer than ever. His smile, however, was not a genial one, but was caused by the thought at how great a disadvantage these English-women were whose consciences would not let them tell lies. Now, an Italian woman, if she had not felt inclined to answer his questions, would have vowed readily enough

that she knew nothing whatever on the matter.

But he said only :

“Will you be good enough to tell me why you hesitate to give me this young lady’s address?”

And Madge answered slowly, as before :

“I do not know that I am justified in doing even that.”

For a moment he let his black eyes rest full on her face.

“She is not so much like Marietta as I fancied about the eyes,” he thought to himself. “She is lovelorn; yes, but she is something else beside. Ah, it is that stupid thing called conscience which makes her unlike Marietta. Marietta knew nothing about that.”

Again he smiled, and said lightly :

“You have scruples! Ah! Englishwomen are always scrupulous—it is their charm,

But to whom shall I go if you will not answer my question? Sir Peter has departed; the Signor Lance is not here. Shall I wait till the Signor Lance comes back, and put my question to him?"

And the way in which he spoke those words, "the Signor Lance," told Madge that her worst fears were realised, and that Sir Peter had surpassed himself in indiscretion.

In addition, it sounded a note of alarm. Lance, most probably, was at that very moment on his way back to Upton. At any cost, a meeting between the two men must be prevented, or at least deferred.

She answered calmly, although she felt that her face betrayed her:

"I suppose you mean Mr. Clive. I do not know that he would feel any more inclined than I do to answer your question."

But, so soon as she had said the words,

it occurred to her that there was in them an undertone of defiance which, in the circumstances, was scarcely prudent. So she added, in a more conciliatory tone :

“You will understand, I am sure, that the fact of a person staying in one’s house, and eating at one’s table, lays obligations of friendship upon one.”

“Ah, you and Miss McIvor were the greatest of friends while she stayed in your house,” he said, in a tone that to Madge’s fancy bordered on the insolent.

She flushed scarlet. What did he, or did he not know ? Had Sir Peter revealed her feelings as well as Lance’s towards Miss McIvor ?

“I did not say that,” she cried, indignantly, then broke off abruptly, fearing where her candour might lead her.

She took a moment or two to recover herself.

“Why should I say anything at all?” she began, and stopped herself again, feeling as one might feel on boggy ground, when every step lands one farther in the mire.

“Why should you, indeed,” he answered, calmly; “and why should I ask questions which make you speak against your will, when I can so easily get them answered in another quarter?”

Madge guessed in a moment which was that other quarter.

“You would not—could not surely——” she began.

“I would—I could surely,” he answered, “apply to the police for information I want if I could procure it from no other quarter. Your English police are immaculate. I should simply say to them: ‘This young lady, whom you have traced for me so far, once attempted to take my life by poison,’

and before a week was over my head, her hiding-place would be found out."

Madge rose to her feet impetuously. The words she had dreaded to hear were spoken now.

"I will not believe it," she cried. "I do not believe there lives a man who would—could act in so despicable a manner!"

He rose also and bowed low. "Madame," he said, "you see that man before you now."

For a moment neither spoke; they simply stood facing each other.

Madge, with her weakened health, her want of confidence in her own powers of persuasion or argument, dreaded to open her lips; the words, "It would be cruel—atrociously cruel!" escaped her against her will.

He bowed again. "I do not contradict you, madame; do you not know that men

are often cruel—‘atrociously cruel’—to the women they love? They will kill a woman rather than let a rival win her.”

And as he said this his dark eyes flashed with an evil light, which made her once more look at his slender white hand and say to herself: “It ought to be red—red as the blood it has shed.”

The Count suddenly changed his tone to his former courtly suavity.

“Why do I tell you this?” he said, softly. “Why do I distress a tender-hearted Englishwoman with stories of what men can, or cannot do, when they love or hate?—let us sit down, madame, and talk this matter over. This young lady is a friend of yours?”

The sudden, upward look which Madge gave him might have been taken to express dissent, but her lips said nothing.

“Well, at least,” he went on, “she is

a friend of a friend of yours!" Here, to Madge's fancy, his insolence in suavity surpassed his former unmasked insolence.

"And being a friend of this friend of yours you wish her well," he continued. "Now tell me, do you not think the young lady would be happier in Corsica, in her own home, among her own people, than among strangers in a foreign land, hiding in terror from your police? Sit down, madame, let us talk the matter over!"

But Madge would not sit down. She stood leaning her elbow against the window recess, looking far away over the Castle grounds and the valley beyond, to the road along which Lance would come riding on his way home.

Suddenly she turned and faced the Count with the question :

"Why must it be one thing or the other? Why will you pursue her in this way?"

Why will you not let her alone to live in England, or in Corsica, as she pleases?"

He laughed a low, scornful laugh.

"Ask the rivers why they flow to the sea; ask the sea why it follows the moon," he answered, "before you ask a man, who loves, why he follows the woman he means to get possession of." Here he broke off a moment, then added, with a sudden, furious energy: "I tell you, madame, if that girl, Etelka, were shut up in the heart of the earth, I would dig her out of it, although I had nothing but these hands to do it with!" Here he extended towards her his slender, white hands. "And I tell you, moreover"—here his voice lost its fury, and fell to a low, sullen, resolute tone, that held even more of menace in it—"I tell you that if I were lying on my death-bed, and I felt that that girl were slipping away from my grasp, I would

take a knife and shed her blood, drop by drop, rather than let another man win her."

All the lazy effeminacy which Sir Peter had fancied he had detected in the man, had disappeared now. His eyes flashed, he set his teeth over his last word. Madge, as she stood silently facing him, took the measure of a man, relentless, cruel, and of iron purpose, and said to herself that he might well figure as the embodiment of the forlorn girl's pursuing destiny. Her indignation would find voice for itself.

"You call that love!" she cried. "A selfish, cruel passion, that would sacrifice everything to the desire of possession!"

He bowed low.

"In England you may call it by another name; but, believe me, in Italy it is what is known by the name of love."

"And you think that such love as that

would bring happiness to you—to Miss McIvor?" she queried, impetuously.

He eyed her keenly for a moment. Then a slight smile curled his lip, and he met her question with another:

"Tell me, madame, are you very much interested in procuring happiness for Miss McIvor, or is it the happiness of the Signor Lance you are thinking of, that you thus refuse to tell me where the young lady is to be found?"

Madge was staggered by this directly personal appeal; also, she did not feel inclined to admit his right to make it.

"I decline to answer that question," she replied, coldly.

He was in no way disconcerted.

"If you wish the Signor Lance to marry Miss McIvor," he went on, "no doubt you do well to keep her hiding-place a secret from me. But supposing"—here his voice

sank to an insinuating tone—"that you did not wish the Signor Lance to marry this young lady, all you would have to do would be to tell me where she is to be found, and the Signor Lance would never hear of her more."

He said the last words with a slow emphasis.

Madge felt as if the pulses of her heart for a moment ceased beating. So, then, she was to be called upon to fight all over again the battle which had nearly cost her her life and Lance his happiness.

The continued gaze of his bold, black eyes became insupportable. She pressed her hand to her forehead, shutting it out; shutting out everything, in fact, except the voice of her own heart, which seemed to tell once more from beginning to end, the story of her shattered hopes and deathless love.

It seemed as if he read the turmoil of her thoughts. He went on mercilessly :

“But of course, since you wish the Signor Lance to marry her—the woman I love—you will not do this. No ; you say to yourself : ‘The Signor Lance is my friend ; I will do my best to give him the wish of his heart.’”

He broke off for a moment, then added, contemptuously :

“Ah, these cold-blooded fools of Englishmen, who will marry with the hot-blooded daughters of the South ! Let them catch a wild bird on the wing, and make it what they call ‘respectable’ before they try to tame a Corsican girl with a wedding-ring !”

Madge felt as if she must go down on her knees, and pray to be delivered from evil. Was this Count Palliardini speaking ? she wondered. In very truth, she could have believed that that poor, reckless, pas-

sionate Madge, who had loved and hated so desperately, had suddenly taken separate bodily form, and stood whispering her evil suggestions with the Count's voice.

She withdrew her hands from her eyes. In the brief moment that she had hidden them, she had fought as mighty a battle with her own heart as ever saint had fought in cloistered cell.

She looked him full in the face.

"I have given you my answer," she said, slowly, decisively. "I cannot—will not give you the information you ask for."

He bowed low.

"Then I must seek it elsewhere," he said. "If you will allow me, I will ring your bell and have that thing—'fly' do you call it?—which carried me here from your station, brought to the door."

Madge laid her hand impetuously on his arm.

“Oh, why—why will you do this?” she cried, passionately. “Why are you so hard-hearted and cruel? If you hunt her down in this way, persecute her, make her miserable for life, you will be none the better for it; it won’t bring happiness to you.”

The look in his cruel, relentless eyes had convinced her that the only plea likely to prevail with him must be based upon purely personal, selfish grounds.

“Madame,” he answered, again bowing low, “I have the honour to wish you good morning. If you will allow me, I will continue my journey at once. I will prefer to discuss my chances of happiness with the Signor Lance.”

CHAPTER XI.

MADGE for a moment stood like one stupefied, listening to the sound of the wheels which carried the Count away, dying in the distance. Then she drew a long breath. Yes, he was gone, not a doubt, and there could be no fear that he would ever return to trouble her with his insolent questions and black temptations; but what, she asked herself, would be his next step, what piece of wickedness would he endeavour to set in motion now?

She began to reproach herself, not for what she had done, but for what she had left undone. She had trampled under foot his hideous temptations, she had given him

a negative to his request—a negative, indeed, so calm and so decisive that any one who heard it might have fancied that she was acting upon a settled plan of action, instead of being at her wits' ends to know what to do for the best. But was the doing of these two things an adequate way of meeting so serious a crisis? Looking back upon her half-hour's interview with the Count, it seemed to her that her pleadings for Etelka had lacked fire and earnestness, and that she had been terribly wanting in common-sense to have let him thus depart without getting from him—as she possibly might have done by adroitly-put questions—some definite clue to his movements and destination.

He had threatened to stimulate the energies of the police by the revelation of Etelka's crime; he had said as a parting word that "he would discuss his chances

of happiness with the Signor Lance," and this, of course, was tantamount to a threat of waylaying Lance with hostile intentions. But which of these two threats did he intend to put into execution first? If the former, then he would no doubt go straight from Upton to London or Liverpool—or it might be to Edinburgh—to one of the chief centres of police inquiry, in fact. If the latter, then he would assuredly remain within a short distance of the Castle, on the look-out for Lance.

She rang the bell, thinking that possibly the servant who had shown the Count out of the house might be able to throw some light upon his movements, or, at least, upon his present destination.

"Did Count Palliardini make any inquiries as to trains when he left the house?" was her question when the servant made his appearance.

“None whatever, ma’am,” was the reply. “He told the man to drive him back to Lower Upton. He asked me as he went out if visitors to the Castle from London or Liverpool must all pass through Lower Upton? Of course I told him ‘yes.’”

“If visitors to the Castle from London or Liverpool must all pass through Lower Upton,” Madge repeated to herself.

The question seemed to point to the fact that the Count intended to await Lance’s arrival at Lower Upton, either to pick a quarrel with him or to dog his footsteps thence, taking it for granted that by so doing he would come upon Etelka’s hiding-place.

Madge felt that her course lay plain before her now.

She was willing enough to admit that sooner or later Lance and the Count, as rival candidates for Etelka’s favour, must

meet face to face, and that no endeavours of hers could prevent such a meeting. She could only hope that when it took place, Lance's cool courage and common-sense might carry the day over the Count's bravado and insolence. It was, however, manifestly to Lance's interest that this meeting should be retarded as long as possible, or at least until after he had seen and pleaded his cause with Etelka.

The one who was first in the field there would be the one likely to win the day—the Count by threats of a criminal prosecution, Lance by the pleadings of his passionate love. Madge knew little enough of the penalty which English law attached to attempts at murder: of the Corsican law on the matter she knew nothing at all. It seemed to her, however, that when the circumstances under which Etelka's crime had been attempted were taken into con-

sideration, together with the Count's object in instituting a prosecution, but a light sentence would be passed on the girl, more especially if weighty influence were brought to bear on her behalf as Lance's affianced wife.

All these thoughts in quick succession passed through Madge's brain. Self was dead in her heart now ; all selfish aspirations, hopes, and longings had had their death-blow dealt to them over again, as it were, in that brief moment when, with hand covering her eyes, she had stood listening to the Count's evil whisperings. All her energies were concentrated now on the endeavour to win for Lance the desire of his heart, just as one on a death-bed does his utmost to ensure the happiness of his dear ones in a future in which he himself can never play a part.

Her plan was quickly arranged. She

wrote a brief line to Lance, telling him of Etelka's hiding-place, and bidding him go there direct instead of returning first to the Castle. There were strong reasons, she added, why he should do this. It would be easy enough, she knew, for him to get to Cregan's Head from Carstairs by posting direct to Elstree, a bleak little village distant about two miles from the headland below which, on a ridge of low rocks, stood the disused lighthouse.

She said nothing of Count Palliardini's unexpected visit, nor of any one of the bewildering events which had occurred in such rapid succession during Lance's short absence from Upton. The great thing she felt now was to defeat the Count's evident intention of either delaying him on his way to Etelka, or of acting the spy and following on his steps.

Her letter written, she cast about in

her own mind for a trusty messenger. Passing over Sir Peter's *protégés*, one and all, she fixed upon Lance's groom as being not only a discreet person, but also a good rider—a consideration this.

She sent for the man and herself committed the letter to his charge, bidding him to take the swiftest horse out of the stables for the nine miles of rocky road which lay between the Castle and Lower Upton. At Lower Upton he was to put up his horse, and take the train to Carstairs; he could just save it by hard riding. At Carstairs he was simply to remain at the station, await Lance, and immediately on his arrival there, place the letter in his hands. Whether Lance came on from Liverpool or direct from London, he must change trains at Carstairs for Upton, and the man had orders to watch all trains arriving from both places.

Madge took the man so far into her confidence as to caution him not in any way to attract the attention of Count Palliardini, who might be waiting about at Lower Upton station ; and still further to prevent such a misadventure, she desired him to change his livery for his plain clothes.

After she had despatched her messenger, she wandered about from room to room, restless, nervous, and ill at ease, occupation of any sort being an impossibility to her.

There was not a soul in the house to whom she could apply for a word of sympathy or counsel. Sir Peter was not likely to get back from his errand of mercy much before nightfall, and Lady Judith, as usual, was down at her farm. The gale of over-night had unroofed a cattle shed, and had sent down a chimney-pot into one of the

poultry yards, so she had deemed her presence at the scene of disaster a necessity, in order to the safe housing of her short-horns and Houdans.

Madge racked her brains to think whether she could better have expedited Lance's meeting with Etelka. At the time that she had despatched the groom on his errand, it had seemed to her that he could not fail of intercepting Lance on his return journey; but now, as she thought over things, all sorts of mischances began to suggest themselves.

The fact that Lance had not acknowledged her telegram of the previous day pointed to one of two things: either that he had not yet returned to Liverpool, and consequently had not received it; or else, that he had decided upon acknowledging it in person by an immediate return.

If the first supposition were correct, he

as yet knew nothing of the good tidings concerning Etelka; but most likely, with a heavy heart, was pursuing in London some supposed clue that might lead him far afield, and Liverpool might not see him for days.

If the second supposition were correct, he might have started on his return journey before she had despatched her messenger; in which case it was possible that he and Count Palliardini had already met at Lower Upton.

She scarcely dared to think of the latter possibility; it seemed a catastrophe whose evil consequences she was powerless to avert. But the first difficulty, looked fairly in the face, did not seem insurmountable. It might be that Lance, in the course of his investigations in London respecting Etelka's supposed death, or Mr. Stubbs's false statements, had consulted Sir Peter's

solicitors on certain points on which, perhaps, he dared not trust his own unaided judgment. If that were the case, they would no doubt be kept informed of his movements, and would have his latest address. Why not telegraph to them for this, and then forthwith send a second telegram to Lance, repeating the message she had already sent by his groom to Carstairs?

She caught at this idea so soon as it presented itself, wondering over her own dulness in not having thought of it before.

To ensure secrecy in the despatch of her telegrams, she resolved that she herself would send them from Lower Upton station. It might be that Count Palliardini, if he waited there, had decided upon watching the wires as well as the rails as a possible source of information.

Also of necessity time would be econo-

mised by her being on the spot to receive the reply from the London solicitors, and Lance would get his message, at the lowest computation, about two hours the sooner for it.

Madge, at her best, was not a good horse-woman, and her recent failure in health had still further unfitted her for a sharp ride along a rough road. According to all showing, she ought to have been ready to collapse from fatigue before she had accomplished five out of the nine miles which lay between the Castle and Lower Upton. The exact contrary, however, was the case.

“When the soul is strong, the body is strong.” With every step her horse took along that steep road, a fresh rush of strength seemed to come to her. Even the keen breeze, from which of late she had shrunk, seemed to bring life and energy to her. By-and-by, no doubt, the inevitable

reaction would set in ; but for the moment she was in the mood in which great things can be dared and done.

“Oh, you,” she said to herself as she rode along, “who once before made it your business to part these two, make it your business to bring them together again, and thank Heaven that the chance of atonement is given to you !”

The afternoon was beginning to wear away. She timed herself for her nine miles' ride.

“Five o'clock,” she said, “it must be when I ride past the knoll at the corner of the station road.” And five o'clock it was.

At this knoll she dismounted, gave her horse to the groom, and bade him wait for her there. It seemed to her that she would attract less attention by slipping into the station by a side door than she would if she rode up to the front.

The wind, which had lulled throughout the day, was beginning to rise now, whistling among the stripped trees and whirling the dry leaves before her in a cloud. The knoll, at which she had pulled up, was crowned with some straggling young hazel trees; the sun had just sunk behind these, leaving a great golden glare which shone through the delicate tracery of slender rods and leafless branchlets, like some pale fire from behind a wrought-iron screen.

Madge had brought with her a long cloak and thick veil. Before she attempted to enter the station, she shortened her habit and donned both cloak and veil.

The telegraph office was on the other side of the lines. The ringing of the bell and a slight bustle on the ordinarily quiet platform announced the arrival of a train from Carstairs, and that consequently the other side could not be reached at present.

She judged it best to slip into the ladies' waiting-room till the confusion subsided. This waiting-room, small in dimensions, owned to a good-sized window, which looked directly on to the platform; through this she could see all that was going on without running any risk of recognition.

Naturally, as she took her stand at this window, her first thought was: "Where is the Count?" A single glance answered her question. There, in the very middle of the platform, he stood, in a line with, but with his back towards her window. Among the sturdy country-folk, with their baskets and bundles, his tall, well-moulded figure showed somewhat as a giraffe might show among a herd of bullocks. He addressed a question to a porter who stood near him; the man appeared to answer it in the affirmative; so Madge conjectured that the question might have been whether

the incoming train brought passengers from Liverpool.

There followed the usual bustle of arrival and departure. Madge thanked Heaven, as the train glided out of the station, that it had not landed Lance at the very feet of his unknown foe.

There seemed to be a good deal of luggage to be disposed of; some had to be labelled for transit to outlying hamlets by later trains. Evidently for this purpose a small box was placed temporarily immediately beneath the window at which Madge stood.

And now a circumstance occurred which sent telegrams out of her head, which, in fact, reversed all her plans, and sent her in hot haste upon another quest.

The Count came close outside her window, and addressed another question to the man whom he had before interrogated.

Madge could not catch the question, but she distinctly heard the man's reply, "No, sir, he has not come by this train," so she naturally concluded that the Count had commissioned the porter to watch for, and report to him Lance's arrival.

She drew further back into the room, for the Count's large black eyes to her fancy seemed to be piercing and searching in all directions. Once she could have vowed that they rested on her window, and she trembled lest her thick veil might be an insufficient disguise. It was not upon her, however, that his eyes were fixed, but upon the box which had been deposited beneath the window, and upon which an address-card had been nailed in rough and ready fashion. The name on that card had evidently attracted his attention.

Madge, closely watching his face, saw a

sudden change of expression sweep over it. Then he took from his pocket a note-book and pencil, and carefully copied the entire card.

A terrible suspicion flashed across her mind. As the Count moved away to the further end of the platform, she crept out of her hiding-place. A single glance at the box confirmed her worst fears ; it was addressed to

MISS ETELKA McIVOR,
Cregan's Head,
Near Elstree,
Cumberland.

The writing was big and bold ; the label on the box showed that it had come from Liverpool. Madge conjectured that possibly it was some friendly package from Jenny, the minister's sister, to whose duties at the observatory Miss McIvor had succeeded, and who, knowing the scanty supplies

Cregan's Head could command, had done her best to remedy local deficiencies by kindly gifts from the big city.

For a moment Madge stood as one transfixed. All her elaborate plans and precautions had been defeated by blind chance.

The Count's voice immediately behind her recalled her to herself. He was asking in his slow, mellow tones, which was the most direct way to get to Cregan's Head.

The man so questioned replied that in about an hour's time a train would start for Elstree, a little hamlet about two miles and a half distant from Cregan's Head. There might be the chance of a horse or a conveyance to Elstree, but people generally walked the two miles. The railway journey from Lower Upton to Elstree occupied about an hour and ten minutes.

The Count had evidently changed his plans, and instead of lying in wait at the

station for Lance, he intended to set off for Etelka's hiding-place with as little delay as possible.

Madge, in one flash of thought, seemed to see alike Etelka's extremity and her own opportunity.

Etelka suddenly confronted by the Count would most likely say, "It is fate," and yield to his combined threats and entreaties; more especially as she was unaware of the fact that Lance's love for her had not wavered, and that Lance's people were ready to welcome her among them.

The only way by which this danger could be averted, it seemed to Madge, would be for her to reach Cregan's Head before the Count, plead Lance's cause with Etelka, and make light of the Count and his threats—hold the ground, in fact, for Lance, till he could take it and hold it for himself.

In pursuance of this plan there was evidently not a moment to be lost.

She made a swift reckoning of the time that would elapse before the Count could arrive at Cregan's Head. There would be an hour before the train would start for Elstree, then an hour and ten minutes in the train, then two miles to walk in the darkness in a country he knew nothing at all about. She felt that close upon three hours was scarcely too much time to allow for all this, and that a pair of good post-horses might cover the distance in about two.

She threw a furtive glance in the direction of the Count. Gas lamps were being lighted on the platform now; beneath one of these he stood rolling up a tiny cigarette in leisurely fashion. His easy attitude, and the half - scornful, half - triumphant smile which lit up his handsome features, seemed

to say : "The road before me is plain and easy now."

With swift feet she made her way out of the station straight to the one inn that Lower Upton could boast.

She lifted her veil and made herself known to the landlord.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Cohen," she said, in answer to the man's look of surprise. "I want to get to Cregan's Head—posting it—within two hours from now. Can it be done?"

The man's face began to lengthen to a demur.

Madge would not let him utter it. "It must be done—it is of first importance," she said, peremptorily. "You know I do not spare my gold when I am in earnest about anything."

Yes, he knew that well enough, as did the whole country round for miles.

“Very well,” Madge went on, watching the demur die rapidly out of the man’s face. “I will give you twenty pounds for every mile of the road your man takes me over if he will get me to Cregan’s Head within — mind, I say within — two hours from now ; and in addition I will give him twenty pounds for himself. And you must not let a soul in the place know that I am here, or that any one has started for Cregan’s Head. I will wait for your horses outside the village, at the knoll beyond the station.”

There were of necessity no objections that were worth weighing against such golden inducements. Madge went back to the little knoll outside the station to dismiss her groom, and to send back a message of excuse to Lady Judith. Within ten minutes from the time that she had given the order at the inn, she was being

whirled along the country road that led to Elstree at an altogether unconscionable speed.

There was no golden glare to be seen in the sky now, it was one expanse of leaden gray, splashed here and there—as if by an angry hand—with sullen red. The wind was steadily increasing in strength.

And it so chanced that at the very moment that Madge was setting off behind her two sturdy, yet swift-footed hacks, Lance, arrived at Carstairs, was reading the letter put into his hands by his groom. It took him about a minute and a half to debate with himself which was the best line of route to be followed, and then he, too, was on the road to the same destination, mounted on the best horse that he could hire in the place.

So here was Etelka's destiny hastening to her that night by three several roads.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT swift drive in the windy darkness along the steep road was one to be remembered. The wind seemed to increase in strength with every half-mile they covered. It was not a mighty wind, but a strong rushing one that filled Madge's ears with all sorts of strange, wild cries, and seemed to bring the rush of the ocean to the very road-side long before they neared the coast. There was a moon, nearly at its full, a cold, white, ghastly thing which showed now and again, when a gust of wind swept away an inky mountain of cloud. Madge held her watch in her hand the whole distance in order to

take advantage of every such passing gust. It had been half-past five as a turn in the road had hidden the slate roofs and gray walls of Lower Upton from view, and seven o'clock chimed from the village church as the sturdy chestnuts clattered along the stony street of bleak little Elstree.

Here at the little inn which vaunted itself as a "railway hotel," Madge dismissed her postboy with his tired horses, and took possession of the only two which the stables of the small hostelry could supply, thereby cutting off from the Count all means of transit to Cregan's Head from this place, save that which his legs afforded.

She reckoned that by this time he must have accomplished about half of his short railway journey from Lower Upton to Elstree, and that consequently in half an hour's time he would be exactly at this point in his road. To this half-hour she

thankfully added another for the two miles' walk along the steep dark road which lay between Elstree and Cregan's Head.

Madge knew Elstree very well, but, as it chanced, had never been to Cregan's Head, in spite of its short distance from Upton. Although she had frequently heard it described as "the other end of nowhere," or "a God-forgotten place, where gulls were plentiful and Christians few," she was totally unprepared for the scene of utter desolation which met her view, as the man pulled up his steaming horses at the foot of a narrow pathway, which seemed cut out of a mass of black rock.

"It's as near as I can take you, ma'am," he said in reply to Madge's astonished exclamation :

"But surely this is not Cregan's Head !"

She strained her eyes, peering into the surrounding darkness.

“Which way lies the coastguard station?” she asked. “Where is the little fishing hamlet, and where the old lighthouse?”

Behind her the bare gray road, along which they had driven, wound away into gloom; before her stood the dark mass of rock, cleft by the narrow, upward-winding pathway; on her left hand lay a dim waste of country, with stunted trees showing black out of the whitish ocean mist which overhung it; on her right hand stretched the expanse of ocean—miles upon miles of moving, rushing, noisy darkness.

The man answered her questions in succession.

“The coastguard station is two miles distant, ma’am, on the other side of these rocks, and the fishing hamlet is half a mile beyond that. This pathway, after winding upwards a little way, descends to a sandy hollow, in which, so far as I know, are

only two cottages. A ridge of low rocks stretches out from this hollow, and on these rocks stands the old lighthouse."

It was not a tempting prospect, this, of having to follow this steep, narrow pathway without lantern or guide.

"If I could leave my horses, ma'am," began the man.

But at this moment a light shone in gradual approach along the road they had just quitted. It suggested to Madge the cheering possibility of a local guide.

To save time, she advanced to meet the light, and found it to be a big lantern carried by a man of about sixty years of age, clad in the rough serge of a fisherman.

In addition to his lantern he carried a basket and sundry bundles, which seemed to suggest the likelihood that he was returning from a day's marketing in a neighbouring village.

He stopped at the unwonted sight of a lady and post-horses.

Madge accosted him, and stated her business in a breath.

“I want to get to the other side of these rocks,” she said. “Is there any one called Harold Svenson living there? Does he live in the old lighthouse, or at one of the two cottages which I am told are in the hollow below here?”

Fortunately the man was able to give her the information she wanted. He lived in one of those two cottages, he said, and Harold Svenson lived in the other, using the old lighthouse simply as an observatory.

“And a mighty lot of queer things he has put i’ the light-room, ma’am,” he went on to say. “Telescopes—Lord ha’ mercy on us!—that show what’s going on i’ the moon, an’ clocks that ha’ insides to them

big enuff to lie down in ; and tell the time, they do, in such outlandish fashion that naebody can understan' them."

It was easy to secure the services of the old man as guide, so Madge at once dismissed the postboy and his horses, exacting from him the promise that, in consideration of the handsome fee she had paid him, he would not take his horses back to Elstree that night, but would put up at the village on the farther side of Cregan's Head.

A fitful gleam of moonlight enabled her to look at her watch once more. It was just three minutes past the half-hour. The Count must be getting dangerously near to Elstree now.

The old fisherman grew loquacious as they trudged along the rocky path. He took the weather side, putting Madge under shelter of the rocks. Every now and then the rush of the wind carried his voice away,

and she could only get at his long speeches in snatches.

He had been a fisherman all his life, he said; his name was Thomas Cundy—he pronounced it “Tammass Coondy”—he hadn’t a big boat now, but just a little cockle-shell of a thing that he had made for himself. He lived all alone in his little cottage; his wife was dead; his daughters were married. He “did” for himself; made his own clothes——

But here Madge interrupted him, her impatience refusing to be longer restrained.

“Had Harold Svenson lately had a young lady—a foreigner—as a visitor?” she asked.

The old man nodded.

“A young leddie, yes. Some fouk wud ha’ called her a witch.” Here a prolonged shake of the head did duty for a sentence. “No one scarce had heard her open her

lips, and he was told she had come from they outlandish foreign parts where people didn't know decent English ways."

As they had talked, their path had been sloping downwards. A black chasm of a hollow lay at their feet, out of which a curl of red smoke, puffed this way and that way by the wind, showed where a human habitation stood.

Cundy nodded to it.

"That's fro' my chimney," he said. "Svenson an' his wife ha' been abed the last half-hour."

"In bed," repeated Madge, dismayed at the possibility of having to arouse the old couple before she could get speech with Etelka.

They were standing on a ledge just over Cundy's hut. On the other side of the hollow, at about the same level, a dark square blot indicated Svenson's cottage.

From top to bottom of it not a glimmer of light was to be seen. Looking seawards, Madge could make out a black line about sixty yards out at sea—a ridge of sunken rocks, no doubt, for there, out of a mist of dashing spray, arose the gaunt outline of the disused lighthouse.

The old man nodded towards it.

“She’s there—the strange young woman,” he said, “she’s not gone to bed, like other Christian folk.”

“What!” cried Madge, aghast, “she’s alone there this terrible night!”

“It’s her own doing — naebody could keep her indoors. You see Svenson had her here to help him wi’ his books and look up at the stars for him—he’s gone blind you know—but directly he set her there to look through his telescope, he couldn’t get her awa’ fro’ it. She crouches over the fire i’ the day time i’ the lower room, and so

soon as the sun sets, she goes up to the light-room and stares at the stars and says her prayers to them as if they were living things. Svenson won't get his book done if he waits for her help I'm thinking. Here we are, ma'am, at Svenson's door. Shall I knock the old people up?"

Madge thought awhile. Why disturb them? Her mission was to Etelka and Etelka only.

She pointed to the gaunt tower with the white-crested waves dashing furiously against it.

"Can I get there to-night, will your boat take me?" she asked.

Cundy shook his head. "Better wait till mornen, ma'am," he said. "The wind is gay bad. There are some nasty sharp rocks between this an' the lighthouse; you might walk across to it in fair weather scarce wetting your feet; but i' the dark

with this sea!" and again he shook his head.

But Madge had not come all these miles to be turned back by the first glimpse of danger. She determined to be lavish with her gold again.

"Listen," she said. "I am a rich woman. I'll give you twenty — thirty pounds if you'll take me across to that lighthouse in your little boat."

The man hesitated a moment, then he shook his head again. "Na, na," he said. "I'm a Christian man, and I've a soul to be savit. I would na risk your life, my leddie, for thirty pounds. If it were only my ain——" here he broke off.

"It will be at my own risk," said Madge, "not yours. See, I will give you forty—fifty—sixty pounds if you'll just row me across that little bit of water!"

"That little bit of water!" The phrase

but ill represented the sixty yards of wild sea which lay between them and the lighthouse.

Possibly the prospect of so large a recompense made the old man feel a little less like "a Christian man with a soul to be savit," for after muttering something which the racket of wind and wave prevented Madge hearing, he bade her wait there in a sheltered corner of the beach while he ran his boat out and saw what he could do.

Minutes seemed to prolong themselves to hours while Madge stood there with that gloomy lighthouse facing her. Once more she pulled out her watch—the hands pointed to five minutes to eight; the Count by this time, most likely, had covered three parts of the road which lay between Elstree and Cregan's Head. Heaven grant that he might miss his way in the

dark, and again and again have to retrace his steps !

And it so chanced that exactly at the moment that the dark figure of old Cundy, dragging his boat behind him, appeared on the beach, Lance, with a heavy heart, was pulling up at a road-side inn, half-way between Carstairs and Cregan's Head, with his horse hopelessly lamed by a big boulder lying in the dark road.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE she got into that boat, Madge had a request to make.

“After you’ve taken me across that little bit of water,” she said, trying to keep up her grand show of courage, “shall you come back here with your boat, or will you stay all night at the lighthouse?”

The old man jerked his head towards his hut, where the dull light of a peat fire showed through one window.

“I’ve just put a bit o’ bacon on th’ peat for my supper; it’ll want turnen by the time I get back,” he said, deeming that an all-sufficient answer.

Madge again thanked Heaven for her

gold. "Listen," she said. "As I told you before, I am a rich woman, and I don't mind spending my money when I want a thing done. I am Mrs. Cohen from Upton Castle ; do you know me by name ?"

Cundy nodded. Madge's name, as local benefactress, was known all over the county.

"Very well. Do you wish to earn a hundred pounds by this night's work ?"

"A hundred pounds !"

"Yes, I will give you that, if, so soon as you get back here, you will stave in your boat—before you turn your bacon even."

The old man gave a sorrowful look at his boat.

"I've had un a long time, it's like a living thing to me—but still—a hundred pounds 's a goodish bit of money—yes, I'll do it, never fear, my leddie."

"And," Madge went on, "soon after

you get back, a man—a gentleman—will possibly find his way to your hut and want you to help him get across to the lighthouse. You must give him no help whatever. Remember, I have bought your services until the morning. Promise me that not a soul shall cross after me to the lighthouse before then.”

The old man was profuse in his promises and protestations.

Directly he had taken his old boat to pieces, he said, he would turn in, put out his fire and all lights, and then not a soul would find out his hut under the shadow of the shelving rocks. As for Svenson, supposing the gentleman succeeded in finding him out, he would be unable to afford any help, for he owned to nothing in the shape of a boat.

Madge’s courage nearly gave way when she and Cundy were fairly launched on

“that little bit of water.” She could never, at her best, boast of much physical courage, and now what with her rapid travelling, and the excitement she had gone through that day, she was beginning to feel far from her best. She hid her eyes with her hand, and sat shivering in the stern of the little boat as it bravely mounted crest after crest of the furious waves. Every moment she expected they would be dashed to pieces against some sharp, jutting crag of that low ridge of rocks, which stretched away from the beach to the lighthouse.

The old man, however, knew his ground, and kept as straight a course as wind and wave would let him. He had not battled with the elements on that coast for fifty years for nothing.

As they neared the lighthouse, the dull, red glare of a fire showed through a high

narrow slit which served for a window. The old man directed Madge's attention to it, exclaiming that, "they furriners were nowt without a fire."

Madge drew her hands from her eyes to find that the boat had reached the foot of a flight of steps, which had been let down from another window below the narrow slit to meet the exigencies of the high tide ; ingress and egress being no longer possible through the door of the lowest room.

The boat tossed now high on top of a wave, now low in its trough. Drenched to the skin and half-blinded with spray, it was with difficulty, and many a misgiving, that Madge scrambled out of the boat and gained the topmost of that flight of steps.

"Push the wooden flap—it opens on th' inside—it's nowt but a shutter," shouted the old man ; and then his boat was tossed

away in the darkness, and the rest of his words were lost to her.

Madge, in haste, pushed back the flap and crept in, fearful lest the next puff of wind might whirl her away like a leaf into the blackness beyond.

For a moment, as she stood within, she could hear nothing—see nothing—for the outside racket of the gale still filled her ears, and she had brought into the light-tower with her a rush of breeze which sent the smoke from the peat fire that burned upon the hearth, whirling in all directions, and obscured the sullen gleam of the firelight. Other light there was none.

Presently those clouds of smoke parted, and Madge could make out that the room in which she stood was lofty, but circumscribed at the farther end by a flight of steps, which wound away upward into dark-

ness. The lowest steps also were begirt with shadows and whirling wreaths of smoke. Out of those cloudy wreaths a pair of large, luminous eyes seemed for a moment to look out at her and then disappeared. The haze of the smoke made everything uncertain ; but she could feel the silent presence of Etelka McIvor, though her eyes failed to assure her of the fact. Madge thought of the last time that she had seen those large, desolate eyes, and her courage began to fail her. She felt that she must speak or succumb as to a spell.

“Are you there, Miss McIvor? I am Mrs. Cohen. I have come to speak to you on an urgent matter,” she said, in a voice which even to her own ears sounded strangely.

Then, from out the smoke wreaths and shadows at the farther end of the room the tall, slender figure of Etelka slowly advanced

and came to a standstill within two yards of Madge.

Madge stretched out her hands by way of greeting.

"Forgive me if I am abrupt," she said; "but time is precious to-night."

Etelka did not speak, did not take the proffered hands, and Madge bethought her of other things beside abruptness for which she ought to beg forgiveness.

She let her hands fall to her side.

"I do not wonder that you will not shake hands with me," she said, sadly. "I did you a grievous wrong once—I have come travelling to you to-night, in the dark and in the storm, to try and undo that wrong—to make amends for it, if amends are possible."

Etelka drew a step nearer. The smoke, carried by the current, was making its way now for the aperture which served as

chimney. The red gleam of the fire threw a fitful light across the gloom, and Madge could get a clearer view of the girl's face. Madge thought that she had learnt to know that face ; she had seen it rigid and white as carven marble ; she had seen it soften and glow as might a carven marble statue flushing into warm life ; she had seen it brilliantly beautiful, radiant with hope, as on the night of the ball ; and she had seen it darkened with its forlornness and despair before that night had come to an end. But the face which confronted her now was none of these.

“Jael, who drove the tent peg into the tired Sisera's forehead, might have had much such a face,” Madge had said to herself on the first day that she and Etelka had met. Now, if time had been given her to put her thoughts into words, she would have said :

“Jael, with a deed of blood in her past, turned prophetess, priestess, seer, might have much such a look as that in her eyes. Is she looking at me or at things in the room which I do not see? Is she talking to me now or answering voices which I do not hear?”

The last thought was caused by Etelka saying in slow, low tones :

“I knew it would come to-night. I said to myself: ‘I may shut myself up here alone, and the winds may make the waves my jailors; all the same, my fate will find me out.’ And lo, it comes travelling to me in the darkness and storm!”

Madge’s heart sank. This was the woman she wished to inspire with energy to fight a pursuing evil in the strength of an encompassing love!

“If fate is finding you out to-night,” she said, trying her utmost to speak out

bravely, "it must be a glad and happy fate, for I come as a messenger of glad tidings. Listen, I bring you news of Lance. He will be here to-morrow morning—the very first thing I hope—to tell you all over again how truly he loves you, and how that it was only in seeming that he gave you up, when he thought—as we all did—that you had—died—at Liverpool."

She faltered over the concluding words. But it was impossible to avoid abruptness. Necessity was laid upon her to say all that she had to say rapidly. In truth, she thought little of the manner of her speech in her eagerness to unfold to Etelka's view the bright things the future might have in store for her, before she told the evil tidings of Count Palliardini, his threats and pursuit.

But it seemed as if Madge might as well

have shouted her good tidings to the stone walls which shut them in, as into Etelka's ears, for, still as a statue the girl stood, with her large, dreamy eyes looking beyond, not at, the flushed, eager face which confronted hers.

Madge lost her self-control. She sprang forward, seizing both Etelka's hands in hers, and crying out impetuously :

"Oh, if one came to me, bringing the glad news I bring to you, I would not stand as you do, saying never a word ! I would go down into the very dust and kiss the feet of the messenger, and then I would jump up and clap my hands and shout for joy ! Do you not understand me ? I come from Lance, as Lance's messenger."

Something of animation shone in the cold, pale face.

"You come as Lance's messenger, do you say ?" she said, in the same slow tones

as before; "then take a message back from me to him. Tell him that since I saw him last a revelation has come to me—the stars have taught me things that they never taught me before."

"Oh, do not talk of the stars now," broke in Madge, impetuously.

Etelka held up her hand.

"Hush," she said, "you are a messenger, you say, therefore you must take as well as bring a message. Promise me you will."

"I promise," answered Madge, strangely impressed with the solemnity of Etelka's manner. It might have been that of a person, who, about to depart on a very long journey, gives minute and special directions as to what is to be done during his absence.

"Say to him," Etelka went on, "that, since I have been here in this lonely place,

I have spent hours looking up at the stars through a grand telescope, and things have changed to me. Tell him I have seen the houses of life in the heavens, and I have seen the house of death; but I have seen something else which has made life and death fade into nothingness. I have seen Eternity there—immeasurable time, immeasurable space. Tell him that—promise me!”

“I promise,” answered Madge, a sense of awe creeping over her, for Etelka’s manner recalled now less that of a person about to depart on a long journey, than that of one about to undertake the longest journey of all—that journey from which there is no return.

There fell a pause. Outside sounded the solemn antiphony of wind calling to wave, wave answering to wind; within, those two women might have heard each breath the

other drew as they stood silently facing each other in the dim light.

Madge felt that she had succumbed to Etelka's strange powers of fascination, as well as to the weirdness of the scene, and had but ill done her work. Why should she, indeed, consent to carry Etelka's messages to Lance, when—as she hoped—he would be here on the morrow, and receive them for himself? One half, also, of her mission remained unfulfilled; her bad news had yet to be told—perhaps it might make a deeper impression than her good appeared to have done—so, making a great effort, she broke the silence, and said:

“There is some one else I must speak to you about besides Lance; for he, also, is on his way to you to-night—some one whom you have no reason to love.”

Etelka started, a change of expression passing over her face.

“Count Palliardini?” she exclaimed, under her breath.

Madge’s reply was cut off by a heavy and prolonged puff of wind, which must have sent the sea dashing over the top of the lighthouse; it set the wooden flap, which served at once as window and shutter, rattling as if it were being shaken on the outside by a human hand.

Madge’s fancy instantly conjured up a vision of Count Palliardini having succeeded somehow in obtaining a boat, and now standing outside on the steps seeking means of entry. She bethought her of the possibility of fastening down that wooden flap.

“Is there bolt or fastening to it?” she asked, at the same time crossing to the window to ascertain for herself what means of securing it could be improvised.

Etelka followed her. Madge pushed back

the flap, and looked out into the darkness, in order to assure herself that her fears were groundless.

The salt spray dashed in her face, the wind sang in her ears. Clouds were scudding rapidly over the face of the wan moon. Not a light was to be seen on the shore in either cottage, and the red curl of smoke from Cundy's fire had disappeared; so Madge dismissed her fears, concluding that the old man had kept and meant to keep his promise to her.

A dark mass of cloud at that moment separating, a fuller stream of light poured down from the faint moon; a receding wave also for a brief space left the air free from spray, and Madge could get a clearer view of the beach. In that brief space she saw something else beside the black outlines of coast and cliff—the figure of a man standing just where she had stood

waiting for Cundy to bring his boat round. Then clouds swept over the moon once more, and sea and shore became again one dark expanse.

Madge knew that Etelka must have seen that man's figure as clearly as she had. She let fall the wooden shutter, and turned impetuously to the girl, taking both her hands in her own.

"Do not fear," she cried, "he can't get to us to-night. Cundy, at my request, has staved in his boat, and there is no other. And to-morrow Lance will be—must be here!"

Etelka's hands were cold and trembling; her breathing came thick and fast.

"He will come—he will be here presently," she said, in low, hurried tones. "I know that man; he will lose his life—his soul—but let go his purpose—never!"

Madge noted with thankfulness that the

girl did not say now, as she had so often before, "It is fate—I bow to it."

"I tell you it is impossible—impossible," Madge repeated, "for him to get here till the tide runs out, which will not be till morning. Oh, Etelka, have you no courage? How can you be so faint-hearted, when you have true and strong friends to take care of you, and such a bright future before you!"

All Etelka's reply was to free her hands from Madge's clasp, lift the wooden shutter, and peer out into the darkness once more.

And this is what they saw when, after a moment's waiting, the faint moonlight again filtered through the drifting clouds—the man standing on precisely the same spot on the beach, throwing off his heavy overcoat and boots, and tightening and drawing together his other garments. He meant to swim.

He, the dandy who carried a pocket-

comb, who had hands whiter than a woman's, and fit for no rougher work than the twanging of a guitar, was going to dare death in the darkness rather than defer his purpose by even a few hours.

A low cry escaped Etelka's lips.

Madge threw her arms around her.

"Promise me," she cried, "that you will not be frightened by his threats; that you will say 'No' to his entreaties! Think of Lance now on his road to you! Think of all the happiness that lies waiting for you!"

Etelka freed herself from Madge's arms.

"He will drown!" she said, in a strained, unnatural tone. "He will be dashed to pieces against the low ridge of rocks in the darkness!"

Even as she spoke black masses of clouds rolled up from the horizon, and the moon was gone.

She walked away to the fire, which still burned low on the hearth.

Madge wondered if she were going to take away the man's one chance by quenching that fire—it still threw a fitful gleam, which must have shone in the outside darkness through the glazed slit in the wall.

But the next moment showed her that Etelka had another purpose. With her foot she stirred the embers together, then, picking up a short pine-bough which lay on the hearth, she ignited it, and carried it, a blazing torch, to the window at which Madge still stood, and passed through it on to the outside wooden steps.

The life which she had once before attempted to destroy she would now do her utmost to save.

To the last hour of her life Madge never lost the vision of that tall, slender figure in shadowy, gray garments standing out

there in the windy darkness, with flaming torch held high above her head. The wind tossed her black hair in disorder about her shoulders ; the torch threw fitful light on the beautiful white face, with wide-open, desolate eyes, and mouth slowly settling into hard, rigid lines.

Not a second Hero assuredly ! For the priestess of Venus lighted the man she loved across the dark waters, but this woman the man she hated.

And as Madge stood dumbly gazing at her, there came a sudden terrific blast which seemed to shake the lighthouse to its very foundations, and turned the solemn antiphony of wind and wave into one wild turmoil of rushing, dashing sound and fury, as of some fiend-orchestra let loose upon creation.

The wooden shutter was wrenched from Madge's hand, the embers of the peat fire

were swept from the hearth, and the room for a moment seemed filled with whirling clouds of smoke and salt spray, which came rushing in through the now unshuttered window.

Something else fell upon Madge's ear beside the roar of the gale and the dash of the waves—a human cry, a crash, and then a great stillness, which seemed something other than the sudden lulling of the wind.

And when, half-blinded with smoke and spray, and with a great terror at her heart, Madge ventured once more to peer out into the darkness, no slender figure holding high a flaring torch was to be seen, nor dark form battling with the angry waves; all that met her eye was the great, black, desolate expanse of furious ocean; nothing else.

“I did my best, Lance, for you—for

her," said Madge, as she ended the terrible story which, with quivering lips and many a halt, she told him on the morrow.

But Lance stood looking at her, saying never a word, struck into silence, not only by the greatness of the tragedy, but by the magnitude of Madge's love for him, which, until that moment, he had never measured.

EPILOGUE.

SIX telegrams from Sir Peter Critchett :

No. 1.—To the Rev. Joshua Parker,
Chadwick Coal Pits, Durham :

“I know you will be glad to hear that the marriage of my adopted son and Mrs. Cohen—delayed a year ago—took place this morning. Excuse haste ; my hands are very full.”

No. 2.—To Mrs. Lancelot Clive, Hôtel
des Anglais, Nice :

“So glad you remembered to send Lady Judith the patent incubators from Paris. I start at once for Redesdale to see that things are going on all right there.”

No. 3.—To same :

“Arrived safely at Redesdale. Lovely weather.”

No. 4.—To same :

“Glad I came here. Lots of things want seeing to. The weather-cock on the top of the village church has stuck at north-east.”

No. 5.—To Lancelot Clive, Esq., Hôtel des Anglais, Nice :

“Forgot to tell you I went to see Stubbs, at Millbank, the other day. Poor fellow—truly penitent—must look after him when he comes out.”

No. 6.—To same :

“Don’t let Madge worry about the weather-cock, I’ll have it set going before you get back. Will telegraph again to-morrow.”

THE END.

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